

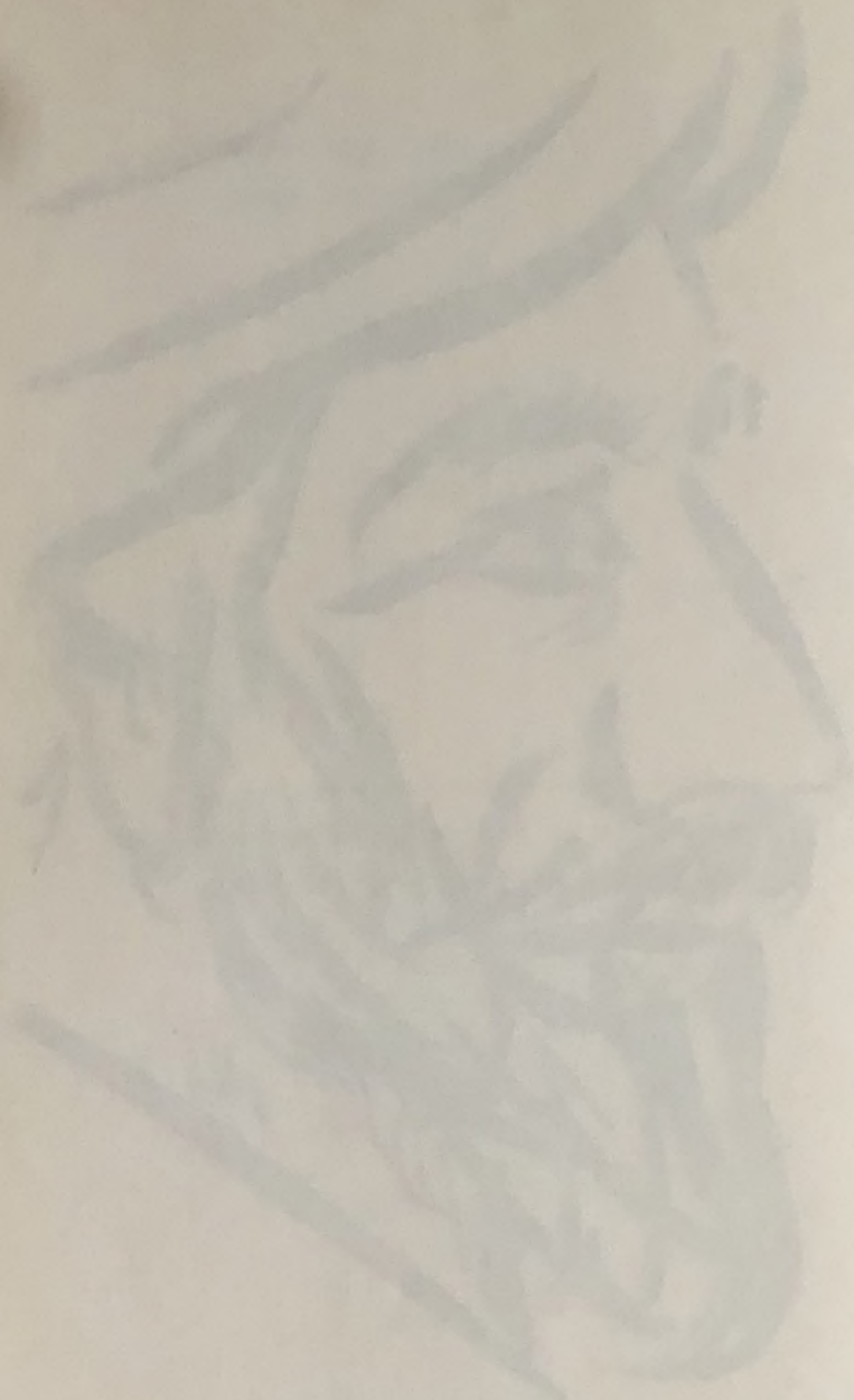
# THE CONCEPT OF MAN IN ISLAM

In the Writings of Al-Ghazali

*by*

**Ali Issa Othman**





TO  
MY PARENTS

whose morning prayers woke me up  
as a child in Beit Safāfa Village with  
the fairest of feelings and thoughts.



## INTRODUCTION

### I

Why does man exist and what kinds of development is his nature capable of ? What ends are best suited to this nature and how can he attain such ends in a life time ? Where, in this nature, does his freedom lie, and where do the obstacles to this freedom lie ? What is the Outside and how can man understand it ? On what bases should he relate himself to the Outside : to human society, to Nature and to God ? Can the ends of the individual be identical with the ends of society ? What kind of goals and ends do people set for themselves and why ? What is the influence of such goals and ends on their growth and self-development ? How can an individual examine the suitability of such goals and ends to his own self-development ?

These and related questions are the main concern of this book. They are studied in the writings of Al-Ghazālī who was, by the consensus of Muslim orthodoxy, if not the greatest, at least one of the greatest exponents of Islam.

The *Qur'ān* was the chief source of inspiration to Al-Ghazālī. Al-Ghazālī's modes of thinking, his fields of interests, his fundamental attitudes and values, his confidence in his ability to reach his ultimate goal, and the significance of knowledge and its function in his thought as a whole, are all rooted in the *Qur'ān*. Al-Ghazālī studied all the systems of knowledge available in his times, but we feel throughout his writings that the broad lines of his interests and of his modes of thought had already been formed. Al-Ghazālī's determination to discover God on acceptable grounds, his rebellion against established authority, and his discovery of the limitations of reason in knowing reality, are some of the attitudes engendered by the impact of the *Qur'ān*.

Just as an illustration, let us study the method by which, according to the *Qur'ān*, Abraham discovered God, and compare this method with that of Al-Ghazālī, discussed in the First Chapter below. The impact is obvious.

The first human being who, according to the *Qur'ān*, identified us



as "muslims"<sup>1</sup> and whose Way Muḥammad himself was commanded to follow<sup>2</sup> was Abraham. The *Qur'ān* elaborates Abraham's method in becoming a Muslim.

(Recall) when Abraham said to his father Azar : "Dost thou take idols as gods ? Verily I think that thou and thy people are in manifest error."

Thus did We show Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and (it is) in order that he may be one of the convinced.

When the night came down upon him, he saw a star; said he: "This is my Lord," but when it vanished, he said : "I love not the things which vanish."

Then when he saw the moon shining forth, he said : "This is my Lord," but when it vanished, he said : "Truly, if my Lord guide me not, I shall be of the people who go astray."

Then when he saw the sun shining forth, he said : "This is my Lord, this is greater," but when it vanished, he said : "O my people, I am quit of what ye associate (with Allah).

"I have set my face towards Him who opened up the heavens and the earth, as a *Ḥanīf* and I am not of the Polytheists."<sup>3</sup>

"Set my face" in the last verse is the act of self-commitment (*islām*) to God. In another context Abraham uses the verb *aslamtu* (from *islām*) to describe this self-commitment. But self-commitment does not just happen. It is preceded by a long process of seeking — in this case started by suspecting the truth of inherited religion. As readers of these verses, we are aware that the subtle Hand of God is with Abraham. But we are also aware that Abraham was not aware of such guidance. He could not be satisfied with the religion of his people. Rebellion alone against that religion was not satisfactory. Abraham was possessed with an overwhelming urge (the *fiṭrah* implanted in every human being) to find a Lord which would give him peace (one of the roots of *islām*) and satisfaction.

We follow Abraham in these few verses and we see him alone during the night, and we feel his strong desire to find his "Lord". But in addition to the strong desire for peace, Abraham was also possessed with a critical mind. He had to examine whether what seemed to him at first his "Lord" could on further examination be actually his "Lord". We feel

(1) *Qur'ān*; 78 : 22.

(2) *Ibid*, 123 : 16.

(3) *Ibid*, 6 : 74 - 79.

his agonies in these attempts and, finally, in a dramatic moment we are relieved. Abraham arrives and attains peace. His scepticism of his people's religion is justified. He quits it and "sets his face towards" Allah as a *Ḥanīf* — a *deviate* rebelling against the worship of idols.

This is *Islam* in its essence : self-commitment in response to the urge implanted in the *fiṭrah* of man; an inner peace which could not be attained without the discovery of God and worshipping Him. This was intended in the very creation of man.

Now, follow Al-Ghazālī in his *Al-Munqidh* (which is his intellectual autobiography) discussed in the First Chapter. All the attitudes exhibited in Abraham's method are there in *Al-Munqidh*.

The student who is familiar with the *Qur'ān* will see for himself the impact of the *Qur'ān* on Al-Ghazālī's mind. We have pointed out in this study some of the instances in which this impact was clear. But the general impact cannot be seen in instances alone; it rather should be felt in the underlying attitudes of thinking and of interest.

This does not mean that an adherent of the *Qur'ān* closes his mind to all human knowledge and experience. On the contrary, the *Qur'ān* demands that such knowledge and experience be known and examined, and this attitude is quite obvious in this study. But what might be called the general "world-view" towards Man, Nature and God is inspired by the *Qur'ān*. The broad lines of this "world-view" become the bases of selectivity as well as direction.

## II

The predominant tone in the *Qur'ān* is an invitation to marvel at and investigate the mysteries and wonders of Nature and of man. This invitation appeals to the aesthetic and the rational in man. This is how God wishes to be ultimately known — as the Author of all that exists. This tone is one of the many qualities which, I believe, characterize the *Qur'ān*, and it is at the basis of what characterizes Islam as a religion.

A scientific explanation of Nature and of man is necessary but not sufficient to understand existence. The aesthetic is also necessary. Man is capable of explaining things scientifically. However, there is something other than the purely "rational" in him which also demands satisfaction.



The *Qur'ān* describes everything that exists, large or small, every phenomenon, every event, every mystery as an *'āyah* : a "sign", a "proof", or an actual miracle, which bespeaks of the Creativity, Power, Wisdom and Love of the Author. These *āyāt* (pl. of *'āyah*), if examined scientifically and appreciated aesthetically, lead the human mind and the heart to God. Man's road to God begins with man's ability to be fascinated as well as with his ability to investigate the questions concomitant to his fascination. Scientific investigation may not by itself yield the discovery of God; yet it is the necessary method which protects the mind while it marvels at Nature and man and which guides it safely on its road to God.

Nothing, according to the *Qur'ān*, is too large or too small, too high or too low, for human fascination and investigation. "Allah is not ashamed to point to a gnat or anything bigger,"<sup>4</sup> as an *'āyah* which, if known, may lead to God and yield further knowledge of the Creator.

The *Qur'ān* is not, contrary to some popular belief, a book intended to contain "all knowledge and scientific discoveries".<sup>5</sup> But that it contains a complete framework of *all* the spheres of knowledge which should be investigated is another matter. The Muslims of this and future generations must seek to answer this and the following questions if they are to uphold the claim of the *Qur'ān* to finality in revelation, and if they are to uphold the claim made in the *Qur'ān* that Islam is the Religion which God accepts.

How does the *Qur'ān* relate all spheres of knowledge in a single comprehension under the absolute unity of God? What kind of attitudes and modes of thought towards Nature and the laws of Nature does it engender in its adherents? What kind of attitudes and values towards oneself and towards others does it wish to cultivate in its adherents? And, in the light of human knowledge and experience, are these attitudes towards Nature and towards man the right and the proper attitudes? What kind of goals and ends does it set for man? And are these humanly attainable, and if sought, do they chart the best course for human development? What kind of society and social order are in harmony with the spirit of the *Qur'ān*?

These and related questions are perhaps the most challenging questions for the Muslims of today. We cannot remain satisfied with

(4) *Qur'ān*; 2 : 26.

(5) See M. Shaltūt (the present Rector of Al-Azhar), *Tafsīr*, Vol. I, "Introduction".

categorical statements concerning these questions, for the mind, and particularly under the present impact of contending ideologies, will in the long run rebell against the very sources for which such statements stand as symbols. We should rediscover the *Qur'ān* to the satisfaction of our "modern" minds. In this endeavor, we have before us all the Muslim tradition and thought, and we have before us all the human experience and knowledge.

### III

What is *Islam* according to the *Qur'ān*?

While every individual thing in existence is an *'āyah* which bespeaks of the Creativity, Wisdom and Love of the Creator, it is at the same time inevitably and inescapably a *subject* to the Laws of existence (*Sunnat Allah*), and, therefore, inescapably a *subject* of God. We shall cite some verses from the *Qur'ān* to show this idea. This is "islam" in its broadest meaning. In this sense, every individual thing which exists (or can exist) is a "muslim". In this sense also, every human being is a "muslim". A particular human being may be a believer or he may be an unbeliever, but he is a "muslim", nevertheless. This meaning is quite explicit in the *Qur'ān* and it is a very important one in any attempt to answer: "What is Islam?" For some verses which express this meaning we might cite:

1. Has not one considered that to Allah *do obeisance* whoever is in the heavens and whoever is in the earth, the sun, the moon and the stars, the mountains, the trees and the beasts, and many of the people?<sup>6</sup>
2. Have they not considered the things which Allah hath created whose shadows extend themselves on the right and on the left, *doing obeisance to Allah in abject submission?* ...  
To Allah *do obeisance* whatever animals are in the heavens and the earth, and the angels; they are not self-conceited.<sup>7</sup>
3. To Allah *do obeisance* all who are in the heavens and the earth, *willingly or of constraint*, their shadows too in the morning and in the evenings.<sup>8</sup>

(6) *Qur'ān*, 21 : 18.

(7) *Ibid*, 16 : 49, 50.

(8) *Ibid*; 13 : 15.



4. Do they desire some other religion than that of Allah (i.e. Islam), when to him *surrenders* (*aslama*) whoever is in the heavens and in the earth, *willingly or unwillingly*, and to him are they made to return ?<sup>9</sup>

In other verses the same idea of inescapable subjection to God is expressed in that everything which exists gives glory to God. But the emphasis here is that everything expresses and fulfils an end intended by God. Thus :

5. ... there is not a single thing that does not give glory in His praise, but ye understand not their giving glory.<sup>10</sup>
6. Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth gives glory to Allah the King, the Holy One, the Sublime, the Wise.<sup>11</sup>

This idea is frequent in the *Qur'ān*<sup>12</sup>. In some of these verses, that which "gives glory" is specified, in some verses every *dābbah*, the generic term for all animals in the heavens and in the earth, in others the mountains, and in others still the birds, and so on.

In brief, *islām* is not limited to man. It embraces all existence and everything in it. The *islām* of a thing may be *willingly* or it may be *unwillingly*. But in either case it is a *muslim*, for to be otherwise, it has to be outside existence and free of all of its laws. This is a fundamental metaphysical fact which is in the essence of Islam.

A further analysis of the above verses will reveal that Islam in its essence embraces the following :

- First, the *islām* of the Cosmos.
- Second, the *islām* of all animate (*dawāb*) and inanimate objects.
- Third, the *islām* of all human beings, either *willingly* or *unwillingly*.
- Fourth, the *islām* of those who commit themselves to God willingly; and
- Fifth, the *islām* of those who follow the "Religion of Allah" — *Islam* — finalized through Muḥammad, with precedents through other prophets.

(9) *Ibid*; 2 : 83.

(10) *Ibid*; 17 : 44.

(11) *Ibid*.; 62 : 1.

(12) *Ibid*.; 59 : 24, 24 : 41, 64 : 1, 21 : 79, 38 : 18.

## IV

Now, for man, he may commit himself to God as an act of his will, or he may in self-conceit and arrogance refuse to commit himself. He would be a "muslim" in either case, but *willingly* in the former case and *unwillingly* in the latter. The reason Satan refused to obey God is, according to the *Qur'ān*, not due to lack of knowledge but due to *istikbār*, i.e. arrogance. This is usually the case with those who refuse to accept God. Man, born with the desire for lordship (discussed thoroughly in this study), finds it difficult to accept himself subject to any other lord, including God.

However, there is another side to man. Deep down in himself he admits the existence of God. The *Qur'ān* refers to this in the following verses :

And if you ask them : "Who created the heavens and the earth ?", they will say : "Allah" <sup>13</sup>.

In the following verse, the *Qur'ān* states that belief in God lies in the very creation of man. Thus :

Recall, when thy Lord took from the children of Adam, from their loins, their posterity and made them testify as to themselves : "Am I not your Lord ?" and they said : "Yea, we testify." <sup>14</sup>

This feeling is included in the concept of *fiṭrah* (the nature implanted in man) in Islam. This *fiṭrah* is responsible for the restlessness which man feels towards the unknown and the concomitant urge to explain and understand it. It is what drives man towards God.

Yet there is also in man "the love for lusts". One verse<sup>15</sup> lists the following objects of desire : women, children, wealth and horses. These and similar objects of desire may preoccupy man from seeking what satisfies his *fiṭrah*.

This conflict between the pursuit of knowledge as the journey towards God and the pursuit of the object of desire is thoroughly discussed by Al-Ghazālī. Al-Ghazālī's writings may be described as an attempt to analyse this basic conflict and resolve it by charting the way to overcome it and to attain self-fulfilment.

(13) *Ibid*.; 29 : 61.

(14) *Ibid*.; 7 : 172.

(15) *Ibid*.; 3 : 14.



But even after one has committed oneself to God and has seriously tried to resolve this conflict, there are degrees of *islām*, each corresponding to the degree of knowledge one attains. These, too, are thoroughly discussed in this study.

The degree of happiness one attains corresponds to one's degree of *islām*, for man according to the *Qur'ān* was not created in sport, but rather was "chosen"<sup>16</sup> by God to be His "viceregent"<sup>17</sup> (*Khalīfah*) on earth, doing His will. Man is, therefore, the bearer of a "Trust"<sup>18</sup> (*amānah*) which he is morally obligated to fulfil<sup>19</sup>. Man's happiness is contingent upon his fulfilment of this "Trust".

The discussion thus far is intended to serve as a background to the study of Al-Ghazālī. It is hoped that the reader will see how important the influence of the *Qur'ān* was on Al-Ghazālī's thought. An exposition of the *Qur'ān*'s view of Nature, of mankind, of human history and of God would have brought out this influence more clearly, but these have to be left for other occasions. Now for a brief biographical note on Al-Ghazālī, the subject of this study.

## V

Al-Ghazālī (or Al-Ghazzālī)<sup>20</sup>, Abu Hamid Muhammed b. Muhammed al-Ṭusi al-Shafī'i, was born at Ṭūs in 450 A.H./1058 A.D. The following story about his childhood is well known.

His father used to spin wool (hence the name "ghazzal") and sell it in a shop at Ṭūs. When he was about to die, he entrusted Al-Ghazālī and his brother Ahmed to a friend who was a *ṣūfī* and a man of good deeds, telling him :

"I regret very deeply that I have not learnt to write. I wish my two sons to realize what has escaped me. Teach them, and do not mind whether you spend for this purpose everything I leave behind me."

(16) *Ibid.*; 20 : 114.

(17) *Ibid.*; 2 : 28.

(18) *Ibid.*; 33 : 72.

(19) See Iqbal: *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*: Chapter IV.

(20) For the evidence available on his name see JRAS, 1902, pp. 18-22 and OM, XV, p. 58. The story of his life is fairly well-known.

When the father died, the *ṣūfī* friend saw to the education of the children. But when the meagre sum of money left by their father was all spent, it was no longer possible for the *ṣūfī* to feed the children. So he told them : "Know that I have already spent upon you all that you have inherited. I am a poor man and an ascetic. I have no money of my own to take care of you. I see that the best thing for you to do is to take refuge in a school (*madrasah*) as though you were seekers of knowledge (students). This way you will get some food to live on."

The two children did exactly this, and it was the cause of their happiness and their great achievements. Al-Ghazālī used to say :

"We sought knowledge not for the sake of God, but God willed that it should not be sought for anything but Him."<sup>21</sup>

Al-Ghazālī got his early education at Ṭūs. He then went to Naysābūr to study under al-Juwayni (d. 478/1085), the Imam of the Ḥaramayn, and remained with him until the Imam's death. From Naysābūr, Al-Ghazālī went to the court of Nizhām al-Mulk, and was part of his retinue of canonists and theologians until 484/1091 when he was appointed to teach in the Nizāmiyyah Madrasah at Baghdad. During this period Al-Ghazālī taught and wrote on *fiqh* (jurisprudence); he also wrote some controversial books against the *ta'limiyyah*.<sup>22</sup>

Very early in his student career Al-Ghazālī showed signs of scepticism. He rebelled against accepting truth on *taqalīd* (uncritical acceptance of knowledge transmitted by others) or on *sam'* (the body of inherited knowledge). At the height of his scepticism in Baghdad, the question which disturbed him most was whether belief in God could become certain knowledge. If God is to be worshipped, He should be known with certainty. This question led him to investigate the nature of human cognizance, and to find out whether certain knowledge in anything is possible for man. These investigations are summarized in his autobiography and are discussed in the First Chapter of this study. The autobiography, however, is too concise for a full understanding of the intellectual and spiritual development of Al-Ghazālī, his final position, and the kind of person he became after he had discovered the basis of certain knowledge. The fact that the basis of certain knowledge in his system

(21) Al-'Iraqi, Introduction to the *Ihyā'*.

(22) Discussed in Chapter I.



involves the entire personality of the seeker of truth makes of Al-Ghazālī's writings a true mirror of his inner personality. His autobiography, to be fully understood, has to be interpreted in the light of his other writings, especially the *Ihyā'*, and particularly the "Books" in the *Ihyā'* which discuss the various aspects of *īmān* (faith). He insisted that the knowledge of every aspect (*bāb*) of *īmān* consisted of three indivisible constituents: (1) *'ilm*, or the body of knowledge which is peculiar to it, (2) *ḥāl*, or the corresponding state of the "heart", and (3) *'amal*, the self discipline which is necessary for the acquisition of such knowledge and the attainment of such a state. We can be reasonably sure that Al-Ghazālī was describing his inner personality when he discussed these aspects of *īmān*.

A descriptive clue to Al-Ghazālī's state of mind before his conversion lies in the distinctions he makes between the various levels of belief. In "The Book of *Tawḥīd* (the Unity of God)", for example, he likens the belief of the masses to a tight "knot" (*uqḍah*) around the "heart". The state of the "heart" on this level of belief is devoid of "joy and openness" (*inshirāḥ wa infisāḥ*). Joy and openness describe the state of the "heart" of those who have arrived at certain knowledge of God and who are, therefore, *nigh* (*muqarrabūn*) to Him. The main difference between the two levels of belief may be said to be a difference in distance or separation between the believer and God. Al-Ghazālī, before conversion, felt himself separated from God, and he also felt that this separation could only be closed through knowledge.

But what is knowledge, and how can one be certain that what one knows is true and corresponds to reality? This question is at the basis of Al-Ghazālī's thought and is discussed in the First Chapter of this study. Under the strain of his feeling of being separated from God, Al-Ghazālī collapsed physically and mentally. He was ill from the month of Rajab to Dhu al-Qa'dah 488/1095. When he recovered, he felt he had to isolate himself from the world. Having provided for his family, he left Baghdad, his brilliant position, and all worldly attachments and, disguising his identity, wandered in Syria. He spent about two years in strict retirement in Syria, travelling to Mecca at the end of 490/1097. This was followed by another nine years of retreat in different places, going back from time to time to his family. He finally returned to the world and an active life in 499/1105. The *Ihyā'* and other books were already written; he preached and taught the *Ihyā'* at Baghdad and Damascus. Shortly after that he became a teacher in the Nizāmiyah *madrasah* at

Naysābūr, where he went in Dhu al-Qa'dah 499/1105. But he did not stay in public life long. He returned to Tūs, his place of birth, and lived there in retirement with some personal disciples, having charge of a *ṣūfī* establishment (*khānqah*), until he died on the 14th of Jamāda II 505 A.H. December 19th, 1111 A.D.

During his wandering period, Al-Ghazālī studied diligently the different schools of thought, especially the works of those known as "philosophers".<sup>23</sup> He turned eventually to Sufism, and, as he put it, God restored to him his belief.

Al-Ghazālī's genius and his contributions to Muslim Thought lie in his discovery of the limitations inherent in the "intellect" as a tool of knowledge, and the central importance of the "heart" as the seat of all knowledge and experience. The "heart" is "connected" with the "intellect" which "intellectualizes" what the senses bring in from the external world and transmits the results to the "heart". The "heart" is also "connected" with the "body" which transmits the variety of its experiences to the "heart". But all the knowledge transmitted through the "intellect" and all the experiences transmitted through the activities of the "body" are not more than suggestive leads (*dalīl*, pl. *dalā'il*) to certain knowledge. The attainment of certain knowledge, in addition to all these leads, requires another source. This source is the innermost part of the "heart": the spirit.

But for the spirit to yield certain knowledge, the "heart" must become free from the interference of "intellect" and the experiences of the "body". Paradoxically, such freedom is attained through what the "intellect" and the "body" transmit to the "heart". The knowledge and experiences brought in through these two sources are essential to

(23) It should be noted here that free inquiry in the nature of truth was not the distinctive quality of the "philosopher" in Al-Ghazālī's times. The "philosopher" was also a person who devoted himself more than others to Greek thought, especially that of Plato and Aristotle, and engaged himself in commenting on their works, modifying their systems, or repudiating some of their principles. Although Al-Ghazālī, for example, would be considered by most students of Muslim thought as the most independent and most original among Muslim thinkers, he would still not be identified as a "philosopher". Nor would he accept such an identification himself. Al-Ghazālī was an *'ālim* (lit. learned man), and should not be identified as a "theologian" either, for "theology" in the Western tradition contains certain connotations and mental commitments which should not be transferred to the *'ālim*. The *'ālim*'s scope of interests and intellectual freedom are as different from those of the Western "theologian" as Islam is essentially different from Christianity.



the "heart's" gradually acquired knowledge of itself. Beyond a certain point, however, this knowledge "veils" the "heart" from knowing its innermost aspects; yet, without these, the "heart" cannot arrive at certain knowledge.

The knowledge acquired from the world of phenomena, through the "intellect" and the "body", cultivates the "heart" to know itself. But in order to know itself *completely*, the "heart" should "experience" the spirit in it, *i.e.* that aspect of it which belongs to the Divine Order and cannot be known through clues coming from the "intellect" or the "body".

Al-Ghazālī's theory of knowledge runs parallel with self-development towards self-fulfilment and is built upon two fundamental assumptions. First, man, or more particularly man's "heart", is created in the image of God, and second, man as a whole is a "microcosm". Certain knowledge is attained when the individual attains a *complete knowledge of himself*. As the image of God, man would know the attributes of God if he acquired a *complete knowledge of the "heart"*; and, as a "microcosm", he would know all the works of God if he acquired a *complete understanding of the works of the "heart" in the body*. All knowledge occurs in the "heart", and certain knowledge is identical with the "heart's" complete knowledge of itself.

There is another side to the "heart" which may arrest or prevent its full development. The "heart", in its experiences with the body, derives pleasure, hates pain, and loves "lordship" (domination, rule, possession, mastery ... etc.) over what gives it pleasure. Its love of pleasure and its desire for "lordship" appear, on the one hand, very early in its life with the "body", and on the other hand, are capable of indefinite development. Most likely then, the "heart" will preoccupy itself with securing sufficient power over the objects of its pleasure. The clues it derives from its preoccupation with securing the objects of pleasure and averting those of pain would be limited in scope, and its knowledge of itself would, therefore, remain partial. In order that the "heart" may attain a complete knowledge of itself and "mirror" the cosmos and the divine attributes, it should discipline its engagement with the needs of the body to protect itself from developing in a limited direction and remaining ignorant of the other attributes in itself. In seeking truth and God then, self-discipline becomes as important as learning.

These and related questions are thoroughly discussed in this study.

This introduction concludes with the pleasant task of expressing my gratitude to those who have helped in one way or another to make this study possible. The encouragement and moral sustenance of my former wife, Dr. Evelyn Adams Othman, enabled me to overcome the trying circumstances under which this book was written. My special thanks are due to my dear and close friends Dr. Ibrahim and Janet Abu Lughod, Ibrahim for his transliteration of the Arabic terms, and Janet for reading the manuscript and improving some of the English. My thanks are also due to Mr. K. Bestawros who, with a rather bad manuscript, did all the proof-reading. And finally to my colleague and friend, Mr. M.S. Kadri, Director of the Arab States Fundamental Education Centre at Sirs El-Layyan, I express my sincere gratitude for his help in publishing this book.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE QUEST FOR TRUTH

The philosophy of Al-Ghazālī is a comprehensive interpretation of Islam — and is, therefore, a complete philosophy of man. Al-Ghazālī is concerned with man in action; and, therefore, with the problems of moral life and self-discipline. But man is a whole and action reflects his inner being; he cannot be understood apart from his psychology and his thinking. Therefore, Al-Ghazālī's interpretation is also a philosophy of human nature as well as a philosophy of man in thought and the laws of thinking. As a complete philosophy of man, Al-Ghazālī's thought constitutes an organic whole comprehending every aspect of human life.

But, viewed in its divisions, his thought seems to fall into a number of separate though organically interrelated subjects. There is, first of all, a system of epistemology which examines the faculties of knowledge and the laws of thinking. There is a system of metaphysics which exhibits the unity of all things in the absolute Unity of God (*Tawḥīd*). There is a system of a moral philosophy which investigates the virtues and vices of the human self and shows their possible harmony and integration in a dynamic development of self-disciplining leading to self-fulfilment. There is a system of education which considers the various stages in the development of human faculties, their fostering and guidance by the proper kind of knowledge at each stage, and the various obstacles to their cultivation. There is a system of "political science" which sketches a polity of believers under the direct "sovereignty" of God and the role and importance of governmental, legal, economic and social institutions in this polity. Finally, there is a philosophy of history which explains the relationship between the permanent and the contingent, the real and the unreal, and the importance of distinguishing between them in the pursuit of the good life. It also sketches the development of human society and the processes of historical change and the necessary attitudes and means to preserve a good society.

We shall see that in Al-Ghazālī there is no rigorous differentiation of knowledge into separate studies. The study of man as one whole confronting nature outside himself is a fundamental Muslim attitude.



This is due to the fact that the individual is accountable for all the aspects of his or her life as a whole. This accountability cannot be divided. Neither can it be separated from his or her immediate accountability to God by any human specialized institution. Because the individual's responsibility is due *only* to God and other responsibilities can only be derived, and because the individual *alone* is responsible for all his or her behavior, all behavior, whether "political", "economic", "social", or otherwise, is essentially ethical. The unity of knowledge is a consequence of the unity of the individual's purpose and the individual's comprehensive accountability.

What Al-Ghazālī set himself to answer can be stated in one question, namely, "What is a good believer, and how is a good believer made?" To the Muslim mind, this question is identical with, "What is a good man, and how is a good man made?" Such a question may seem to be limited to theology and moral philosophy, but again, to the Muslim mind it comprehends every aspect of human life. A good believer, in order to believe, should first of all discover and know God — the object of his belief. Thus, the first question which Al-Ghazālī asks is: "How does man know, and is he potentially equipped to know God?" From this question many others naturally follow. Thus, from a biographical approach to the individual's life, he asks: What is the essence of human nature and what kind of self-fulfilment does it embody? What are the stages of development in the individual's life and the corresponding unfolding of his faculties of knowledge? What are the handicaps he is born with and the barriers he may acquire in his career in the pursuit of knowledge and belief, and how can he overcome them? What are the types of personality that are arrested or perverted from the ideal development as a result of these handicaps and barriers? What kind of knowledge and principles should a good believer be guided by before he himself achieves a private personal possession of the foundations of his belief? What kind of cultivated traits and attitudes does his ability to know and believe presuppose and what is the relationship between knowing and acting, between his quest of truth and conduct and self-discipline? Finally, what kind of knowledge would a good believer be possessed of when he achieves self-fulfilment?

Approached from the point of view of the individual's associations with others, the following questions arise. Why is the individual ultimately and only responsible to God? What does his responsibility to society, its members and its institutions mean? And finally, what is

the ideal political, economic and social order for a community of believers, each of whom is individually and directly responsible to God?

Approached from the point of view of the individual's relatedness to the world, such problems as those concerning the reality of things and their importance to man's desires, pleasures and ambitions arise. Put briefly, the question here is: What is the proper relatedness of man to things, and why and how does the individual's relatedness to them influence the development of his personality, his ends and his ability to know?

Thus the question of what is a good believer and how he is made encompasses a complete world-view. In his interpretation and systematization of Islam, Al-Ghazālī examines man as a knower, the nature of man and the various possibilities of its development, man's relatedness to the outside, to both nature and society, and man's relatedness to God.

Al-Ghazālī's philosophical and theological thought sprang directly from his personal experiences. Our best authority on his intellectual and spiritual struggles is his *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl* (Deliverance from Ignorance), an autobiography which he wrote at the peak of his maturity, when he was more than fifty years old, a few years before he died. Throughout his entire life he was possessed with a great passion to know reality. From his early youth, he refused to accept any idea on the mere ground of human authority without sufficient proof of its truth or reasonableness. He later even refused to rely upon his senses and reason without first submitting them, as instruments of knowledge, to the most rigorous and critical examination. He tells us that by the age of twenty he had already freed himself from the bonds of *taqlid* (blind acceptance of authority). In this book he relates the difficulties he encountered in his attempt to extricate truth from the confusion of contending sects and to distinguish the different ways and methods of arriving at truth.

Although we have no reason to believe that Al-Ghazālī ever rejected or even doubted the teachings of Islam in themselves, his mind, as a young student, was not completely settled as to why he believed. His period of doubt was a period of questioning whether belief and certainty could be identical. He never challenged the doctrines of Islam as such. His problem concerned the gap between man as knower and man as believer. Does man possess the power to become certain of the objects of belief? Where does such power lie, and how can it be cultivated? Thus his life was devoted to searching for a sound basis of belief in his



human faculties and to the disentanglement of the true from the false among the variety of schools of thought and theological systems. As a result of his investigations, he went through a well-marked and permanent conversion fourteen years before his death and spent these years partly as a *ṣūfī* wanderer and partly as a teacher. Most of his works were written during this period.

In this and other books he repeatedly warns the beginner that the journey to discover truth is extremely slow, tedious and hazardous. Although such a journey may lead the traveler to achieve the height of self-fulfilment and an immediate knowledge of God, it is, on the other hand, full of dangerous turning points in the processes of learning, and thus may lead the traveler astray. To be an ardent seeker of truth is naturally better than to be an imitator and negligent of the quest. However, the beginner does not possess the adequate bases, in experience or knowledge, for a personal commitment to a particular idea or a particular system of thought. He should start as an imitator of the best and most learned of men, as well as a student of the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah*. From such safe quarters he should explore for himself and aspire for a personal gradual discovery of truth. Among the multiplicity of theological systems and the variety of schools of thought, all of which claim a monopoly of truth, the discernment of the true from the false "constitutes ocean depths in which the majority drown and only a minority reach safety."<sup>1</sup> It is a task which, if someone undertakes, he should possess a genuine desire to discover truth, a keen and open mind, and a great endurance and perseverance not to yield in the face of perplexing difficulties.

In these warnings Al-Ghazālī sets the highest challenge that a human being may conceive of; yet, on the other hand, the dangers involved are too risky to dare. Should the individual remain satisfied with imitation and thus probably save his soul? Or, should he dare and aspire for the highest of bliss and happiness — the knowledge of God — carrying with him the risk of going astray? This is what Al-Ghazālī repeatedly considers the real challenge to man.

Al-Ghazālī felt that his earnestness to seek a personal discovery of the truth rather than choose a life of imitation was not a matter of

(1) *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*, p. 20. All quotations from *Al-Munqidh* refer to the English translation "Deliverance from Error" in *The Faith of Al-Ghazālī* by W. Montgomery Watt, London, 1953. The author always compared this translation with the Arabic text. In a few cases he made some changes.

immediate choice or contriving. It was his "habit and custom from an early age". The next sentence which follows this one immediately is: "It was instinctive with me, a part of my God-given nature ..." <sup>2</sup> The urge to seek truth, he meant, was given to everyone, yet to seek it or not required an early habituation. This idea will become clearer when we discuss his conception of human nature and the possible developments within it.

As we have already said, Al-Ghazālī's primary objective was to establish his belief upon firm ground. This meant the growth of his intelligence to understand and comprehend the realities of the objects of his belief rather than a premature inquiry into whether these objects existed or not. As a true seeker of the meaning of truth, he subjected the processes of his thought, whatever he learned and whatever he experienced, to the most critical examination. In his search for truth he made some of the most important epistemological discoveries, anticipating by seven hundred years some great European philosophers such as Hume and Kant. But such discoveries did not impress Al-Ghazālī. His primary goal was not to investigate the laws of human reasoning and understanding. His ultimate goal was to know God in order to believe in Him. On his journey to God he felt he had to inquire into the laws of thinking and understanding in order to ascertain whether man was at all capable of comprehending God and the reality of things. If, at any point, he found his mind incapable of accepting the objects of his faith, he would question his present ability to comprehend and understand rather than the existence of the objects of his faith, and would proceed to seek assistance from his experiences or even look for other faculties within himself besides the intellect. He would rather accept his human helplessness than abandon his faith. On the other hand, he would settle for nothing less than when his belief becomes identical with his certainty, for he would not want to be accused of negligence and "fall short in the seeking of what should be sought."<sup>3</sup>

There was no knowledge, regardless of its source, which Al-Ghazālī, unlike orthodox theologians before him, did not consider valuable for his purpose. Thus, he tells us in his autobiography:

From my early youth, since I attained the age of puberty

(2) *Ibid*, p. 21.

(3) *Ibid*, p. 26.



before I was twenty, until the present time when I am over fifty, I have ever recklessly launched out into the midst of these ocean depths, I have ever bravely embarked on this open sea, throwing aside all craven caution, I have poked into every dark recess, I have made an assault on every problem, I have plunged into every abyss, I have scrutinized the creed of every sect, I have tried to lay bare the inmost doctrines of every community. All this have I done that I might distinguish between true and false, between sound tradition and heretical innovation. Whenever I meet one of the *Baṭīniyah*, I like to study his creed; whenever I meet one of the *Zāhiriyyah*, I want to know the essentials of his belief. If it is a philosopher, I try to become acquainted with the essence of his philosophy; if a scholastic theologian, I busy myself in examining his theological reasoning; if a *ṣūfī*, I yearn to fathom the secret of his mysticism; if an ascetic (*Muta'abbid*), I investigate the basis of his ascetic practices; if one of the *Zanādiq* or *Mu'aṭṭilah*, I look beneath the surface to discover the reasons for his bold adoption of such a creed.<sup>4</sup>

Al-Ghazālī's scorn of the authority-based beliefs was inspired, according to *al-Munqidh*, by the famous Tradition (*ḥadīth*) which states that "Everyone who is born is born with a 'pure nature' (*fiṭrah*, i.e. with an innate disposition to seek and know God); it is his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian or a Magian". This *ḥadīth* marks a crucial point in Al-Ghazālī's thinking. It gave him support to rebel against naive imitation (*taqlīd*) which he condemned at every occasion; and he stretched it to include Muslim children as well. He observed how readily people embraced the belief and teachings of their parents and teachers, whether they were Muslims or non-Muslims, and continued to abide by these beliefs the rest of their lives without further critical reflection, while each was born, according to this *ḥadīth*, with an innate urge to become an individual seeker.

This phenomenon of the purity of every child and his or her innate disposition to seek God and know Him on the one hand, and the adulterating lasting influence of the parents and teachers on the other, "moved [Al-Ghazālī's] inmost being to discover what this original nature really was and what the beliefs derived from the authority of parents and teachers really were."<sup>5</sup> This problem underlies his great

(4) *Ibid*, pp. 20-21.

(5) *Ibid*, p. 21.

passion for truth as well as his disgust for unreasoned dogma. It also underlies his equally great passion to write and teach, warning against the pitfalls of thinking and some habits of the mind.

The discovery of the *fiṭrah* (original nature) of man and its disposition to find and know God was obviously not possible through direct means or direct reasoning. One way to find out the natural intention of *fiṭrah* would be to analyze the different aspects of human nature, look into the best possible hierarchy of relationships among them, and then find out whether man would know God when he acts from the highest aspect of his nature. This Al-Ghazālī does extensively in several of his works and we shall discuss it in later chapters. Another way would be to examine all existing ideas and beliefs and the assumptions and principles which underlie them in order to distinguish the true from the false. The true should be what conforms to the natural fulfilment of *fiṭrah*. *Fiṭrah* would then mean the essence of human nature which is naturally disposed to inquire about and know God if freed from outside diverting influences and guided by truth. The concept of *fiṭrah* is very fundamental in Muslim thought. To Al-Ghazālī it meant a natural obligation to seek and acquire a personal belief.

Before Al-Ghazālī could begin to discern the true from the false among the existing systems of thought, beliefs and doctrines, and before he could know things as they really were, he had to answer a primary question which underlies any such investigations, namely, the competence of the knower to know and judge the object of knowledge. It was "indispensable", as he put it, "to ascertain what knowing really is." This is one of his most radical departures from the theologians' habit of accepting the body of knowledge handed down on the authority of previous generations, and from their criteria of judging other systems of thought or doctrines. Theologians before him judged other doctrines and systems from the point of view of what had already been accepted by their own school of thought. It was their common habit to state the position of their school, opening it with these words: "Our brethren have agreed...", or "The People of Truth have agreed..." This established agreement was their most common criterion to refute other doctrines by pointing out how the latter differed from their own position. They would also try to show self-contradictions in the doctrine in question through the art of syllogistic logic, commonly known among them as *kalām*.

Al-Ghazālī was the first Muslim thinker to examine seriously the



competence of man to know and think and to analyze the processes of thinking, as a prerequisite to judge the results of thought. He wanted to be sure that man as a knower was capable of knowing the objects of knowledge as they really were. He, therefore, set for himself the following definition of what certain knowledge should be in order to find out whether his human faculties were capable of achieving it.

It was plain to me that sure and certain knowledge is that knowledge in which the object is disclosed in such a fashion that no doubt remains along with it, that no possibility of error or illusion accompanies it, and that the mind cannot even entertain such a supposition. Certain knowledge must also be infallible; and this infallibility or security from error is such that no attempt to show the falsity of the knowledge can occasion doubt or denial, even though the attempt is made by someone who turns stones into gold or a rod into a serpent. Thus, I know that ten is more than three. Let us suppose that someone says to me: 'No, three is more than ten, and in proof of that I shall change this rod into a serpent; and let us suppose that he actually changes the rod into a serpent and that I witness him doing so. No doubts about what I know are raised in me because of this. The only result is that I wonder precisely how he is able to produce this change. Of doubt about my knowledge there is no trace.'<sup>6</sup>

With such an unyielding standard, he proceeds to test what kind of knowledge he possesses that would meet such requirements. He extends his doubt of the knowledge received from authority-based beliefs to the knowledge received from his senses and mind. He examines all the faculties of knowledge of which he is aware, and when he discovers the limitations of the intellect as an instrument of knowledge, he becomes desperate and asks himself whether there is a faculty beyond the intellect of which he may not be aware. In other words, should he stop at the level of the intellect and give up all hope of knowing God and reality, or should he search further into himself for some power within him of which he is not aware but which may satisfy his purpose? For this question it is better to allow Al-Ghazālī to speak for himself. The following passage, besides summarizing his epistemological position, indicates briefly that his *ṣūfism* (Muslim mysticism) is not a subjective

(6) *Ibid*, pp. 21-22.

system of knowledge, but is rather rooted in the intellect and the senses and cannot be understood apart from them.

After having investigated the various kinds of knowledge he had, he proceeds to say:

I found myself destitute of all knowledge with this characteristic of infallibility except in the case of sense perception and necessary truths. So I said: 'Now that despair has come over me, there is no point in studying any problems except on the basis of what is self-evident, namely, necessary truths and the affirmations of the senses. I must first bring these to be judged in order that I may be certain on this matter. Is my reliance on sense perception and my trust in the soundness of necessary truths of the same kind as my previous trust in the beliefs I had merely taken over from others and as the trust most men have in the results of thinking? Or is it a justified trust that is in no danger of being betrayed or destroyed?'

I proceeded, therefore, with extreme earnestness to reflect on sense perception and on necessary truths, to see whether I could make myself doubt them. The outcome of this protracted effort to induce doubt was that I could no longer trust sense perception either. Doubt began to spread here and say: 'From where does this reliance on sense perception come? The most powerful sense is that of sight. Yet when it looks at the shadow (sc. of a stick or the gnomon of a sun-dial), it sees it standing still, and judges that there is no motion. Then by experiment and observation after an hour, it knows that the shadow is moving and, moreover, that it is moving not by fits and starts but gradually and steadily by infinitely small distances in such a way that it is never in a state of rest. Again, it looks at the heavenly body (sc. the sun) and sees it small, the size of a *dīnār*; yet geometrical computations show that it is greater than the earth in size.'

In this and similar cases of sense perception the sense as judge forms his judgments, but another judge, the intellect, shows him repeatedly to be wrong; and the charge of falsity cannot be rebutted.

To this I said: 'My reliance on sense perception also has been destroyed. Perhaps only those intellectual truths which are first principles (or derived from first principles) are to be relied



upon, such as the assertion that ten are more than three, that the same thing cannot be both affirmed and denied at one time, that one thing is not both generated in time and eternal, nor both existent and non-existent, nor both necessary and impossible.'

Sense perception replied: 'Do you not expect that your reliance on intellectual truths will fare like your reliance on sense perception? You used to trust in me, then along came the intellect-judge and proved me wrong; if it were not for the intellect-judge you would have continued to regard me as true. Perhaps behind intellectual apprehension there is another judge who, if he manifests himself, will show the falsity of intellect in its judging, just as, when intellect manifested itself, it showed the falsity of sense in its judging. The fact that such a supra-intellectual apprehension has not manifested itself is no proof that it is impossible.'

My ego hesitated a little about the reply to that, and sense perception heightened the difficulty by referring to dreams. 'Do you not see?', it said, 'how, when you are asleep, you believe things and imagine circumstances, holding them to be stable and enduring and, so long as you are in that dream-condition, have no doubts about them? And is it not the case that when you awake you know that all you have imagined and believed is unfounded and ineffectual? Why, then, are you confident that all your waking beliefs, whether from sense or intellect, are genuine? They are true in respect of your present state; but it is possible that a state will come upon you whose relation to your waking consciousness is analogous to the relation of the latter to dreaming. In comparison with this state, your waking consciousness would be like dreaming. When you have entered into this state, you will be certain that all the suppositions of your intellect are empty imaginings. It may be that this state is what the *sūfis* claim as their special 'state' (sc. mystic union or ecstasy), for they consider that in their 'states' (or ecstasies), which occur when they have withdrawn into themselves and are absent from their senses, they witness states (or circumstances) which do not tally with these principles of the intellect. Perhaps that 'state' is death; for the Messenger of God (God bless and preserve him) says: 'The people are dreaming; when they die, they become awake.' So

perhaps life in this world is a dream by comparison with the world to come; and when a man dies, things come to appear differently to him from what he now beholds, and at the same time the words are addressed to him: "We have taken off thee thy covering, and thy sight today is sharp".<sup>7,8</sup>

The condition of Al-Ghazālī was now miserable and for two months he wandered in the darkness of intellectual despair and felt himself on the verge of madness. He could no longer repel the above ideas by demonstration, for demonstration required a knowledge of first principles which at this moment he did not admit. His deliverance from this malady was, as he says, due to a Light which God caused to penetrate into his heart. And now he understood fully the meaning of the Qur'anic verse: "Whenever God wills to guide a man, it is He Who enlarges his breast for 'Islam'." The term "Islam" in this sense carries its original meaning. It is not the formal historical religion, but rather that deep personal "self-commitment" to God after having felt Him. When the Prophet was asked about the meaning of "enlarging" (*sharḥ*) in this verse, he said, "It is a light which God most high casts into the heart." When asked, "What is the sign of it?" he said, "Withdrawal from the mansion of deception and return to the mansion of eternity."

Of this critical moment in his spiritual conversion, Al-Ghazālī says: "This did not come about by systematic demonstration or marshalled argument, but by a light which God most high cast into my breast. That light is the key to the greater part of knowledge. Whoever thinks that the understanding of things Divine rests upon strict proofs has in his thought narrowed down the wideness of God's mercy."<sup>9</sup> This light was not a revelation of truth. Truth had still to be sought and attained. But now he had established a personal faith in God, and had discovered the limitations of human intellect in this regard. Intellect had left him with a deep feeling of alienation from his objective, a sense of separation between himself and God. He had exhausted his intellectual vigor, but ended in despair when the subtle touch of God delivered him. This sudden impulse of faith appeared to him to proceed from divine enlightenment as a flash bringing hope. It meant to him that divine inspiration and revelation were real, and above all, it meant that human knowledge

(7) *Qur'ān*, 50, 21.

(8) *Al-Munqidh*, pp. 22-25.

(9) *Ibid*, p. 25.



of truth depended ultimately on something beyond reason and the rules of reasoning. Something higher than reason as an instrument of contact with reality must exist in man and, although it depends in its activation upon a divine spark, it alone enables the ardent seeker to achieve a knowledge of reality and of God.

Al-Ghazālī's point in all these accounts is to show that all diligence should be used in seeking, and that the task is perfectly fulfilled when the quest is prosecuted up to the stage of seeking what is not sought. "For first principles are not sought, since they are with us, and, if what is present is sought for, it becomes hidden and lost. When a man, however, seeks what is sought and that only, he is not accused of falling short of what is sought."<sup>10</sup>

Now as a result of "God's grace and abundant generosity", Al-Ghazālī proceeded with renewed energy to study the teachings and methods of all those who professed to be seekers after truth. He divided the various seekers of truth of his times into four groups: (1) the *Mutakallimūn* (the scholastic theologians) who claimed that they were the exponents of knowledge and intellectual speculation, (2) the *Bāṭiniyah*, who, as the party of "authoritative instruction" (*ta'lim*), claimed that they alone derived truth from an infallible hidden *imām*, (3) the philosophers, who regarded themselves as the exponents of logic and demonstration, and (4) the *ṣūfis*, or mystics, who claimed that they alone entered into the 'presence' of God and possessed vision and intuitive understanding.

Al-Ghazālī assumed that truth cannot lie outside the knowledge of these four classes. "These are the people who tread the paths of the quest for truth. If the truth is not with them, no point remains in trying to apprehend the truth."<sup>11</sup> Now, why did he not assume that there was an area of truth still unknown to mankind? Why was his orientation to apprehend and understand rather than look for gaps in the legacy of thought and add his "contributions" and "original" ideas to the wealth of human knowledge? What did he understand by "the truth" and what was his purpose and interest in seeking it?

These are some of the most serious questions in order to understand the general and predominant attitudes of Muslim thinkers towards history, time and knowledge. The attitudes implicit in these questions

(10) *Ibid*, p. 26.

(11) *Ibid*, p. 27.

were not peculiar to Al-Ghazālī. They characterize Muslim thinkers in general.

The banquet of knowledge was supposed to be already there, with everything that could be desired. What the seeker of truth actually sought was to cultivate his personal ability to select and discern and understand. "Originality", as we understand it today, was not a conscious attitude motivating the Muslim seeker of truth. In the case of Al-Ghazālī, for example, his thought is full of important new ideas and "contributions" to human knowledge. But these were of minor importance in the overall purpose of his quest. To him they were merely a part of a life of self-education and self-fulfilment aiming at happiness. The orientation of a Muslim *‘ālim* (learned man) was to achieve within himself a fulfilled state of being through knowledge. Whether such knowledge originated through him or through others was secondary. Its only importance is its influence on his growing personality as he is seeking happiness and God. Although knowledge is good in itself and the search for it is the highest of human activities in the hierarchy of human ends, yet it is just a means, though the most important one, to happiness.<sup>12</sup> The purpose is happiness; and truth, already known or not, is sought for this purpose.

The above four classes were all concerned with the same basic questions of the Self, the World and God. It is knowledge of the truth of these that is essential to happiness. In the individual, the subtle touch of God is responsible for creative intelligence. But the most important function of intelligence is to discern and comprehend the existing truth about them.

Truth in itself and outside man's knowledge does not have a biography of development. Only the individual's understanding of it has. Thus there is permanence in truth and change in understanding. The history of Muslim thought in general cannot be fully understood by an "evolutionary" approach to the history of ideas. The truth which is essential for happiness is supposed by Muslims to be all there and complete — in the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah* (Traditions of the Prophet). But before admitting the *Qur'ān* as revealed truth, the Muslim should ascertain the existence of God and the phenomenon of prophecy. In this sense Islam has to be founded upon philosophy, i.e. upon human efforts to

(12) Al Ghazālī, *Ihyā' ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*; Lajnat al-thaqāfah al-Islāmiyah edition, Cairo, 1356 A.H., p. 23. All quotations from The *Ihyā'* refer to this edition.



understand reality and discover God. The next step is to understand and comprehend the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah*, and for this purpose, all human knowledge is valuable. The human *understanding* of the *Qur'ān*, whether that of an individual or that of all, may be studied from an "evolutionary" approach. But the *Qur'ān* itself is not subject to time. It is truth expressed in human words. To take the ideas in it merely as a crude primitive germination of human ideas which later Muslim generations "developed" and matured through the efforts of human thought is to overlook the permanent significance and meaning of the *Qur'ān* to the Muslims.

There is the use of human philosophy and reasoning to discover and accept God and, consequently, admit His *Qur'ān*; there is the use of human efforts to understand the *Qur'ān*. In these two aspects there is a history of "developed" Muslim thought, for both aspects are human. But in the *Qur'ān* itself, as the embodiment of divine and eternal truth, there can be no "development".

The history of Muslim thought, as understood by the Muslims themselves, is only an attempt to *understand* the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah*. They would even go as far as saying that all human thought and experience genuinely concerned with truth should be an attempt to understand the *Qur'ān*. Thus they have always boldly and confidently sought to study the knowledge and experiences of all others. Their understanding, being human, is subject to development and growth. Schools of thought and interpretations and systems of theology may be born, grow up and die. They may interact and borrow from all the cultures outside the Muslim culture. The individual is free to follow this or that school, or borrow from this or that culture. If he cares for this freedom, he is his own master, for, in the final end, no one else can be blamed for the kind of personality he has achieved and, consequently, his salvation except himself. There are no limitations on borrowing or seeking knowledge except the orientation to find God and understand His *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah*. And, if seeking is chiefly the exploration of all that there is in the outside, this limitation is one of interest and the making up of one's mind.

"Progress", whether for the individual or for society, is equivalent to the degree of understanding and the self-fulfilment resulting from it. It is not an unfolding of the mysteries of the unknown future. The unknown, as far as human happiness is concerned, is, in a sense, known. It is in the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah*. Progress is to understand them and

act upon this understanding. They are both the roots (*'uṣūl*) to start from, as well as the fruits of the end of the journey towards truth and happiness. What happens in between is human understanding, which is subject to progressive enrichment.

Therefore, in order to understand fully the thought of a Muslim thinker, or Muslim thought in general, the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah* should be studied as the embodiment of all those *comprehensive* attitudes which urge or motivate thought in particular directions for particular ends. We cannot see Muslim thought in the right perspective unless we appreciate and understand the *Qur'ān* as a motivator of thought and an end of knowledge. Without such understanding, the student of Muslim thought must continue to work in the dark. It is in the direct impact of the *Qur'ān* on the Muslim mind that we may discover those unwritten, but perhaps the most important and fundamental, orientations towards truth and human ends. In these orientations lie the Muslims' general sense of history and change, their peculiar sense of time, and their peculiar sense of purpose in seeking knowledge.

After these brief remarks on the method of understanding and studying Muslim thought, we return to Al-Ghazālī to follow him in his studies and criticisms of the four classes of seekers of truth and to see to what conclusions he has arrived.

Although his main interest was to arrive at the truth through studying the teachings and systems of these classes, he had now established certain criteria of judging their methods and doctrines as a result of his own personal experiences. These criteria became his primary tests in accepting or rejecting an idea as well as the basis of his criticisms of the assumptions of a particular school of thought.

He is now certain of the existence of God and of the possibility of His direct guidance to man. He is also aware that intellectual rigor alone is insufficient to know religious truths and that the knowledge of these truths depends ultimately upon something beyond the intellect in man where contact with divine revelation becomes possible. Thus, in his studies of a particular system of thought or a class of seekers, his main questions are : What faculty in man is their system built upon ? What are the limitations inherent in that faculty as an instrument of knowledge ? And finally, is such a faculty capable of knowing God directly and experiencing revelation ?

It is in his answers to these questions that Al-Ghazālī has discovered



the limitations of the methods of all the schools of theologians (*mutakal-limūn*) and the methods of the "philosophers" known to his times regarding the knowledge of God and reality and the proper understanding of the *Qur'ān*. According to the above criteria, he has pointed out the limitations inherent in their methods and some of their erroneous conclusions. On the other hand, he has pointed out the proper place for scholastic theology and "philosophy" in Islam as a whole, adding to these the methods of mysticism in comprehending the realities of religious truths.

This study cannot possibly give an adequate account of Al-Ghazālī's views and criticisms of the methods and teachings of the above groups. The following is just a brief survey of his most important criticisms and appraisal of these various groups. It should be noted that his division of the classes of seekers into scholastic theologians, *Bāṭiniyah*, philosophers, and *ṣūfis*, is not a division of sects or religious groups but rather what he considered a division of methods used in seeking the truth. It is a division which cuts across sects and existing schools of theology.

It was Al-Ghazālī's habit to study the system of each class of seekers, obtain a thorough grasp of it, formulate his findings, then evaluate and criticise their doctrines, sometimes in separate books. This habit he considered essential to save truth from the casuistry of hollow argumentation. One of his major criticisms of the scholastic theologians was that they were indifferent to and, consequently, ignorant of systems of thought other than their own. Thus, in his review of the "philosophy" known to his times, he lays down the following general rule :

I was convinced that a man cannot grasp what is defective in any of the sciences unless he has so complete a grasp of the science in question that he equals its most learned exponents in the appreciation of its fundamental principles, and even goes beyond and surpasses them, probing into some of the tangles and profundities which the very professors of the science have neglected. Then, and only then, is it possible that what he has to assert about its defects is true.<sup>13</sup>

In his review of the teachings and doctrines of the *Ta'limiyah*, the second class, he was reproached for the "painstaking restatement of

(13) *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*, p. 29.

their argument" in such a fashion and with such honesty that no one among the *Ta'limiyah* themselves could have done a better job.<sup>14</sup> Al-Ghazālī, however, considered such a restatement essential to detect the falsities in their teachings.

It was natural that Al-Ghazālī would commence his criticisms with the methods of the scholastic theologians, i.e. with *'ilm al-kalām*. Until his time, *al-kalām* had unjustifiably usurped the highest place in theological training. He himself was trained in this tradition and wrote on *kalām*. He saw in the prestige of *kalām* a great barrier to the quest for truth and his struggles with the scholastic theologians were more vital and bitter than his struggles with the other classes. The other classes were much weaker in number as well as in prestige and influence.

He could not see in *kalām* more than a talent for "systematic argument which lays bare the confused doctrines invented by the heretics at variance with traditional orthodoxy."<sup>15</sup> It was not more than a technique of logic which these theologians had adopted as a method against the disputations of schismatics. Their arguments, however, were based on "premises which they took from their opponents and which they were compelled to admit by naive belief (*taqlīd*), or the consensus of the community (*ijmā'*), or bare acceptance of the *Qur'ān* and Traditions... Such a method, besides being on shaky grounds and always subject to undermining, cannot enable the seeker to attain a knowledge of truth. For one who admitted nothing save necessary truths, it was by no means adequate."<sup>15</sup> Although theologians, in time, embarked on a study of substances and accidents with their nature and properties, they did not deal with these thoroughly since that was not the aim of their science. Consequently, "they did not arrive at results sufficient to dispel universally the darkness of confusion due to the different views of men."

In his *Ihyā'*, he discusses *kalām* with all the other sciences, and the usefulness of each. He says : "It may be imagined that *kalām* is useful in disclosing the reality of things and knowing them as they really are. There is nothing in *kalām* to satisfy this noble purpose... The gate to the foundations of knowledge is blocked up on this side."<sup>16</sup> It may be true that *kalām* discloses, defines and clarifies certain matters; but "these are exceptions and true only in clear matters which could almost

(14) *Ibid*, p. 44.

(15) *Ibid*, p. 28.

(16) *Ihyā'*, p. 168.



be comprehended before indulgence in the art of *kalām*". In such matters, the intricate scholastic reasoning of the theologians may be more harmful than useful. It obscures an issue that may otherwise be clear. The beginner is impressed by the strange terms used and thus imagines that *kalām* is knowledge. And, most harmful of all, *kalām*, its method being argumentative and its audience the opposing factions, breeds zealotism and closed-mindedness for a particular line of reasoning.<sup>17</sup>

*Kalām* is useful and needed, according to Al-Ghazālī, only in one situation, namely, when the beliefs of the masses are being disturbed by schismatics. The theologians in such a situation should use it as a tool to attack heresies by making explicit the contradictions in their doctrines, thus preserving the beliefs of the masses. In a community where such a situation does not exist, *kalām* is more harmful than useful. When it is taught, the student should not be given the impression that it is knowledge; he should be made aware that it is only a tool which may be of value in the above situation.

The next class Al-Ghazālī studied was the "philosophers". It seems that he was not acquainted with their thought in his early training. His remark that "none of the doctors of Islam had devoted thought and attention to philosophy" implies that philosophy was not considered essential in the training of theologians. Actually, whatever knowledge scholastic theologians had of philosophy came chiefly through their polemics with the "non-orthodox" groups, some of whom were well trained in philosophy. Therefore, he set out "in all earnestness to acquire a knowledge of philosophy from books, by private study without the help of an instructor."<sup>18</sup> He devoted two years to the study of their sciences, and continued to reflect on what he had assimilated for nearly a year "until [he] comprehended surely and certainly how it was deceitful and confusing and how far from true and from being a representation of reality."<sup>18</sup>

In this period the term "philosophers" identified specific individuals who were students of the Greek tradition, especially that of Plato and Aristotle. The most influential Muslim representatives of this tradition, and those who became the masters of Al-Ghazālī in his studies of philosophy as well as the objects of his severe criticism later on, were al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīna, and the *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (the Brethren of Purity).

(17) On these problems, see his *Fayṣal*, i.e. *The Decisive Criterion for Distinguishing Islam from Heresy*, Cairo, 1907.

(18) *Al-Munqidh*, pp. 29-30.

In his criticism, Al-Ghazālī concentrated on the Aristotelianism of Muslim philosophers. He did this for several reasons. First, it was not within his power to discuss all ancient philosophers. Secondly, Aristotle was regarded by Muslim philosophers as the greatest philosopher who himself had refuted a number of the doctrines of others, including some of Plato, and established the best. Al-Ghazālī, therefore, confined himself to the two best Muslim representatives of Aristotelianism, al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīna, and considered the commentaries and translations of others "marked by disorder and confusion."<sup>19</sup> But perhaps the most important reason for this process of economizing his task was that he differed with the philosophers on a few major points, and a criticism of the best Muslim philosophers, al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīna, would satisfy his purpose and remove the danger of their doctrines to good belief. Otherwise, his *Ihyā'* is full of Plato (we do not know whether directly or indirectly), especially Plato's doctrines of the virtues of the soul, their union in the idea of justice, and the importance of this union to the pursuit of knowledge.

Thus he had two primary objectives in his philosophical writings. One was directed against some doctrines of the "philosophers" which he considered false and, therefore, dangerous to good belief. The other was directed against some predominant prejudices among the scholastic theologians towards the whole discipline of philosophy which he considered equally dangerous to good belief.

Al-Ghazālī's first step was to reproduce objectively, and without explicit criticism, the Aristotelianism of the Muslim philosophers in his *Maqāṣid al-Falāsifah* (The Aims of the Philosophers), as a preparation for his major criticism of their philosophy in *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah* (The Recklessness of Philosophers). This method of objective reproduction of what will later be refuted was conceived by him, as he explained in the preface of *Maqāṣid*, as a prerequisite preparatory work.<sup>20</sup>

The introduction of *Tahāfut* reveals the very disturbing attitude of

(19) *Ibid*, p. 32.

(20) *Maqāṣid* was translated into Latin towards the end of the 12th Century without the preface, and was mistakenly considered as a statement of Al-Ghazālī's philosophy. Thus, St. Thomas Aquinas refers to it as Al-Ghazālī's metaphysics in his *Summa*, q. 45, Art. 5 (note 6). This Latin text was edited in 1933 by Rev. A.T. Muckle.

The title of *Tahāfut* has been mistakenly rendered into English sometimes as "Destruction" and sometimes as "Incoherence". Al-Ghazālī used the term "*tahāfut*" in his *Ihyā'*, p. 127, to mean "recklessness", or the superficialities in the processes of thinking due to rash arrogance.



some of those who have identified themselves as "philosophers". Al-Ghazālī remarks that there are some seekers of the truth who, guided by their personal pride rather than by quest for truth with humility, have associated their names with some grandiose names such as Socrates, Hippocrates, Plato, Aristotle and others. The chief desire of such men was to elevate themselves above the mass of people by disdaining religious authority, though they themselves were at the same time bewildered by the vast knowledge attributed to the Greek geniuses. It was this dangerous attitude towards truth that motivated Al-Ghazālī to delve into the works of the Muslim "philosophers" with the express purpose of demolishing their confidence in the immunity of reason. In this task he meets them on their own grounds by using their terminology and methods of reasoning.<sup>21</sup>

It would be a grave error to think that Al-Ghazālī attacked philosophy as such. He found that "the views of Aristotle as expounded by al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīna are close to those of the Muslim writers."<sup>22</sup> Yet, he found the "philosophers" at fault in twenty "questions" (*masā'il*) and tried to refute them in these one by one. These "questions" are all metaphysical in nature and are beyond the scope of this study. The first "question", for example, discusses such problems as "The Eternity of the World", "Choice between Similar and Pure Will", "Time and Space" and "The Possible, the Impossible and the Necessary."<sup>23</sup>

His major quarrel with the philosophers centered around the insufficiency of reason in knowing and judging "religious" truths. He considered their greatest fault to be their assumption that theological and metaphysical realities should satisfy the conditions of "intellectual" reasoning and demonstration. Most of their errors, and even the differences among themselves, were primarily due to their reliance upon reason in realms where it was not competent. It is true that there are spheres of knowledge in which reason is fully competent and even supreme — those sciences which depend on sense perception and axiomatic principles for their fundamentals. But the superiority of philosophers in such branches of knowledge does not qualify them to speak authoritatively on religious subjects. The superiority of reason in

(21) *Tahāfut*, p. 17. Edition of : Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, Beyrouth, Imprimerie Catholique, 1927.

(22) *Al-Munqidh*, p. 37.

(23) These problems are discussed by George J. Tomeh in *The Muslim World*, vol. XLII, July 1952, pp. 177-188. Tomeh gives a list of the other nineteen "questions" at the end of his article.

mathematics and logic, for example, should not necessarily mean its superiority in the fields of theology and metaphysics. If some of their conclusions in the latter fields contradict the truths of revealed religion, it is because reason (or intellect), which is the highest faculty developed in them, is itself deficient and, therefore, not fully competent to comprehend these truths and judge them. Their thinking on these matters is mingled with the deficiencies of reasoning.

In the field of "ethics", the philosophers have borrowed their ideas from the mystics. Reason by itself cannot discover the virtues of the soul nor the norms of good and evil. The philosophers'

... whole discussion of ethics consists in defining the characteristics and moral constitution of the soul and enumerating the various types of souls and the methods of moderating and controlling them. This they borrow from the teaching of the mystics ... (who) in their spiritual warfare have learned about virtues and vices of the soul and the defects in its actions, and what they have learned they clearly expressed. The philosophers have taken over this teaching and mingled it with their own disquisitions, furtively using this embellishment to sell their rubbishy wares more readily.<sup>24</sup>

But from whom then did the Greek philosophers get their ethics? The *Qur'ān* declares that a group of godly men (here identified with the mystics) have existed in every age and "of whom God never denudes the world."

In the field of "politics", what Al-Ghazālī considered the sources of the philosophers' knowledge are more complicated. It is sufficient for the moment to say that the philosophers in this field too have borrowed from divine scriptures and men of piety. However, in worldly and governmental affairs, reason and practical worldly experience are necessary complementary sources of knowledge.

The other branches of philosophy, namely, mathematics, logic and the natural sciences, depend upon the discoveries of reason and experiment and, therefore, are *neutral* between "philosophy" and "theology". What Al-Ghazālī meant by "neutral" was that, in their own particular spheres, these sciences could serve both philosophy and theology equally, and should not be condemned by theologians merely because they have

(24) *Al-Munqidh*, p. 38.



traditionally belonged to "philosophy".

He was keenly aware of some of the dangerous attitudes of close-mindedness common to the scholastic theologians of his age, as well as some common psychological habits among beginners. His warnings were chiefly directed to the young seeker who, on the one hand, should not close his mind to any source of knowledge but, on the other hand, should not uncritically accept a doctrine, even if the source is his own group. Unfortunately, Al-Ghazālī's free spirit of inquiry has not been fully appreciated by later Muslim generations. According to him, the theologians engaged themselves in polemics against the philosophers in "obscure and scattered utterances so plainly erroneous and inconsistent that no person of ordinary intelligence would be likely to be deceived, far less one versed in the sciences."<sup>25</sup> In his review of the branches of philosophy, he was an educator besides being a critic, indicating both the virtues and limitations of the sciences. The precision of mathematics, for example, and the clarity of its demonstrations may lead one student to believe that all the sciences of the philosophers resemble this science. Such a student has already heard the accounts "on everyone's lips of their (the philosophers') unbelief, their denial of God's attributes, and their contempt for revealed truth".<sup>26</sup> This student is likely to say to himself: 'If religion were true, it would not have escaped the notice of these men since they are so precise in this science.' He may conclude, basing his conclusion on the philosophers' unbelief, that truth lies in the denial and rejection of religion.

Another type of student is one who is loyal to Islam but ignorant. This type "thinks that religion must be defended by rejecting every science connected with the philosophers." In this case, "a grievous crime indeed against religion has been committed by the man who imagines Islam is defended by the denial of mathematical sciences."<sup>27</sup> Attitudes similar to the two above were also involved in the study of logic and natural sciences, and Al-Ghazālī warned against them.

*Kalām*, the method of the theologians, was actually the principles of logic utilized in theology, except that "logic" was a branch of philosophy, and "*kalām*" of theology.<sup>28</sup> Each, however, employed somewhat different

(25) *Ibid*, p. 29.

(26) *Ibid*, p. 33.

(27) *Ibid*, p. 34.

(28) *Ibid*, p. 35.

expressions and terms from the other. The student of philosophy studied logic; the student of theology *kalām*.

The most serious hazard in the study of logic as a branch of philosophy is that the student who admired the clarity of logic may imagine that the doctrines of the philosophers in metaphysics and theology are supported by similar demonstrations. Such a student might hasten to accept these doctrines before he studied the latter sciences and, thus, hasten into unbelief.

Otherwise, there was nothing in these three branches of philosophy (mathematics, logic and natural sciences) which Al-Ghazālī considered opposed to revealed truth, nor was there anything in revealed truth which was opposed to them by way of negation or affirmation.

This was a direct attack upon the scholastic theologians who had condemned these sciences merely because they were studied and approved by philosophers. These theologians even refrained from studying certain books on the sole ground that their authors were considered "non-orthodox". "If we open this door", he warned, "if we adopt the attitude of abstaining from every truth that the mind of a heretic has apprehended before us, we should be obliged to abstain from much that is true."<sup>29</sup>

This closed-mindedness of the theologians not only excluded the philosophers, their sciences and their literature from "orthodoxy", but was largely responsible for the fanatic divisions within the schools of theology themselves. Many theologians and students of theology were in the habit of accepting a statement of an author or a source they had already approved, even if that statement was false and rejecting a statement of an author they already disapproved, even if that statement was true. Such dangerous tendencies were responsible for extremely unhealthy zealotism, each group claiming a monopoly on truth and denouncing as infidels all those who deviated from their own system of doctrine.

Al-Ghazālī tried to combat this evil in his teachings and writings. He wrote his *Fayṣal* (already referred to) with the specific purpose of establishing the criteria necessary to distinguish a Muslim from a heretic, showing how this unwarranted kind of group identification barred the individual seeker from the knowledge of truth. On this occasion he found ample opportunity to demonstrate the incompetence of the *kalām* of

(29) *Ibid*, p. 41.



the theologians and the ground upon which groups among them had built their zealotism.

However, while Al-Ghazālī was deeply disturbed by the evil of closed-mindedness, he was equally afraid of the influence of some literature on the beliefs of men of "weak intellect", and he advocated a strict censorship of such literature for these persons. This censorship seems to be inconsistent with his attacks on closed-mindedness. Would Al-Ghazālī himself, or even any of his contemporaries, have considered this an inconsistency? Certainly not.

Al-Ghazālī, or any Muslim *‘ālim*, was not merely concerned with the minds of the few educated and reflective elite. He was as much, if not more, concerned with the minds of all Muslims. His audience was at different levels of training and understanding. Only a minority (*Khāṣṣah*) could devote enough effort and time to seek truth unreservedly as a basis of their beliefs. To this minority there should be no limitations, and closed-mindedness is obviously an evil. The majority (*‘āmmah*) of Muslims, however, could not devote enough time and train themselves adequately to discern individually the true from the false. The protection of their beliefs from falsities was the responsibility of the *‘ālim*. In this regard, the *‘ālim* was the "heir" of God's Message to this majority.<sup>30</sup> The *‘ālim* had, therefore, a double responsibility; one, to seek for himself the truth without any reservations; the other, to protect the beliefs of the masses from being undermined by anything false or anything presented in a recondite style which their reasoning could not comprehend. The idea was that once an individual had chosen not to devote his life entirely to the pursuit of knowledge and, consequently, did not develop his understanding, his belief was more important for his salvation than his exposure to every kind of literature.

Advice, in preference to censorship against some attractive but "dangerous" books, especially those which contain maxims of the prophets and utterances of the mystics mingled with heresy, was not sufficient nor effective, for "the majority of men are dominated by a high opinion of their own skill and accomplishments, especially the perfection of their intellects for distinguishing true from false and sure guidance from misleading suggestion."<sup>31</sup>

Al-Ghazālī wrote an essay (*al-Maḍnūn bihi ‘alā Ghayri Ahlihi*) showing how the masses should be educated in religion and how their questions

(30) *Ibid*, p. 40.

(31) *Ibid*, p. 40.

should be answered. Assuming that their reasoning is, at best, rhetorical, he thought that their education and the answers to their questions, following the example of the *Qur'ān*, should utilize only parables and anecdotes and verses from the *Qur'ān* or Traditions from the *Sunnah*, without philosophical elaboration.

Now, to recapitulate, neither the *mutakallimūn* nor the "philosophers" had satisfied Al-Ghazālī's aim "in full".<sup>32</sup> As far as the theology and metaphysics of the "philosophers" were concerned, he had already found from his personal experience that "intellect" (or reason), which was the highest faculty used by them, "neither comprehends all it attempts to know nor solves all its problems."<sup>33</sup>

Before moving on to the next class of seekers after truth, it is worthwhile mentioning that Al-Ghazālī rated some philosophers (Gairdner suggests al-Fārābī himself in his "Introduction" to *Mishkāt*) higher than all scholastic theologians on the scale of self-fulfilment.<sup>34</sup>

The third class, the *Baṭiniyah*, were known as the *Ta'limiyah*, i.e. those whose source of truth was the *Ta'lim* (authoritative instruction) of an instructor who was supposed to be infallible. This instructor, however, was "hidden" and, if known at all, it was claimed that he was known only to a few disciples who spread his teachings to mankind.

The danger of this group and their teachings was felt by the Caliph who commanded Al-Ghazālī to write a book "exposing what their religious system really is."<sup>35</sup> This commission satisfied the original impulse within Al-Ghazālī to make a thorough study of their thought. His sources were both their written and their oral teachings. In collecting, arranging and formulating their doctrines, Al-Ghazālī did such an honest and accurate presentation of their system that his orthodox friends (*al-Ḥaqq*) reproached him for such an excellent restatement. His answer was both that of a true scholar and a wise defender of truth. First, he could not allow himself, in expounding their teachings, to be "suspected of neglecting the essential basis of their argument, or having heard it, of failing to understand it."<sup>36</sup> Second, he thought that only by articulating their doctrines in the best possible form could their

(32) *Ibid*, p. 44.

(33) *Ibid*, p. 44.

(34) *Mishkāt*, Introduction, p. 1. Quotations from the *Mishkāt* refer to the English translation by W.H.T. Gairdner, *The Niche for Lights*, London, Royal Asiatic Soc., 1924.

(35) *Al-Munqidh*, p. 44.

(36) *Ibid*, p. 54.



weak points be brought out. Only in this manner would the *Ta'limiyah* themselves take such a refutation seriously, and only in this way might the spread of their movement be prevented.

There is nothing in the *Ta'limiyah* system that commands our interest here except perhaps one point, and that is their contention that disagreements among men will never be removed unless all derived what was true from one single source — from an infallible *Imām*. Al-Ghazālī hypothetically conceded to them that even if such a person with such a power actually existed, it would be an entirely different matter whether all men would give heed to his teachings, understand them equally and, consequently, reach universal agreement regarding what was true. History teaches that there has never been a means of capturing the interest and attention of all — not even the performance of miracles. He reminded them of the case of Jesus, whose miracle of restoring life to the dead “has not brought all mankind to know the truthfulness of Jesus.”<sup>37</sup>

Although Al-Ghazālī had full faith in the capacity of the individual person to discover truth for himself, he entertained no hope that all mankind would ever reach universal agreement about what is true and, consequently, remove all disagreements among themselves. He did not even consider such an end desirable. In his system, a universal agreement would mean the self-fulfilment of each; or, in other words, each devoting his or her entire life and time to knowledge and self-discipline — a task which is all-consuming. Nobody would be left to take care of the worldly needs of mankind and human society would, consequently, perish.

A doctrine of one source of truth for all, even if valid, was not only impractical and undesirable, but full of immediate destructive dangers. Even the use of force could not accomplish universal agreement. Thus, sarcastically he asks the *Ta'limiyah* :

Does the *imām* claim that he is able to bring them (mankind) all forcibly to pay attention? Then why has he not so far done so? To what day has he postponed it? Is not the only result of his claim that there are more disputes among mankind and more who dispute? These disagreements certainly gave grounds for fearing that evils would increase until blood is shed, towns reduced

(37) *Ibid*, p. 51.

to ruins, children orphaned, communications cut, and goods plundered.<sup>38</sup>

Dissatisfied with the methods and teachings of the three classes of seekers, Al-Ghazālī finally turned to the study of *ṣūfism*. His teacher and master in his early training in scholastic theology had been al-Juwayni who, in his private life, was a practicing *ṣūfi*. It was not uncommon for scholastic theologians to live a life of piety very similar to that of the *ṣūfis*. However, the theologians and the rationalists had until then scornfully rejected *ṣūfism* as a method of knowledge and had condemned some of its doctrines. *Ṣūfism* had discarded the superiority of the “intellect” in the knowledge of reality and had categorized the “intellect” among the numerous “veils” which the seeker of truth should eventually purge himself in order to achieve pure knowledge. Instead it claimed that only through a “spiritual” and direct experience was the knowledge of reality and God humanly possible. In some of its doctrines *ṣūfism* had annihilated the gulf separating man and God, and had been accused of making the Self God and God the Self. Some *ṣūfis* had even scorned the rituals of worship and religious laws as unnecessary for one who has already known God through direct experience.

As a result of Al-Ghazālī's influence, *ṣūfism* was not only admitted to orthodoxy by the theologians, but became the highest goal of orthodox believers. Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406), in his *Muqaddimah* (Prolegomena), included among the *ṣūfis* the Companions of the Prophet and pious men and women of later generations although he was aware that the term “*ṣūfi*” was a much later invention. Then was it due only to Al-Ghazālī's influence that *ṣūfism* was admitted to orthodoxy?

The scholastic theologians until the time of Al-Ghazālī had ranked *kalām* as the highest discipline in theology and had scorned *ṣūfism* even though the private lives of the pious among them were not different from those of the *ṣūfis*. These theologians had guided their lives by what guided the lives of the *ṣūfis* themselves, but without contributing to the specific doctrines of *ṣūfism* — i.e. by the highest ideals in the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah* and the highest models among men of piety in the early generations of Islam. Ibn Khaldūn made the degree of piety and knowledge his criterion in judging who was a “*ṣūfi*”, even if such a person had never heard of *ṣūfism* or, as a theologian, had “rejected” it.

(38) *Ibid*, pp. 49-50.



If we accept Ibn Khaldūn's criterion, then we have to inquire about and understand that strange phenomenon among the scholastic theologians. Why did they rank *kalām* so high in the pursuit of theological training while, at the same time, they derived their ethical and spiritual norms from entirely different sources? Why did *kalām* acquire such a high place in their studies? Did it ever have an equal place in their inner lives — in their personal knowledge?

This is a question which can be answered adequately only by a thorough study of the lives of many men among them. It may be that *kalām* had acquired the prestige it did among the theologians because it became their most important tool to defend the doctrines of orthodoxy. Their differences with others, the *Mu'tazilites* for example, were primarily differences about such problems as God's attributes, particularly His Omnipotence, Unity and Justice and the implications of these attributes on man's freedom of will and choice. Such problems were obviously the most serious in theological investigations, and *kalām* was the tool to formulate and defend the orthodox position. But whether *kalām* contributed to the contents of that position, or whether the individual scholastic theologian discovered or even enriched these contents through the assistance of *kalām*, and thereby guided his inner life accordingly, was an entirely different question.

In other words, scholastic theology (*ilm al-kalām*) was not a philosophy of life, if we omit such doctrines as came from other sources. The intellectual pursuits of the theologians were thus not quite reconciled with their moral and spiritual pursuits. Like the teacher of Al-Ghazālī, they could be masters of *kalām* while, at the same time, could live the life of a *ṣūfī* without accepting *ṣūfism* as a method of knowledge. The pious scholastic theologian was a *mutakallim* (master of *kalām*) only as a defender of orthodoxy. Otherwise, in his view of the reality of the Unseen and his calculation of it in his private life, he was close to a *ṣūfī*.

Al-Ghazālī succeeded in introducing *ṣūfism* officially into orthodoxy because it was already there in practice. His greatest contributions to orthodoxy were to point out the limitations and scope of *kalām* in the pursuit of truth and to substitute a moderate *ṣūfism* in its place, articulating for the first time a single organic interpretation of Islam as a whole way of life. Former theologians habitually followed the beaten path of previous masters and occupied themselves with attacking specific points in other systems because those points were different from their own position. They closed their minds to those systems. They did not conceive orthodoxy

itself as an organic whole, except perhaps in their private lives.

Intellectual investigation was not sufficient in the case of *ṣūfism*; a complete understanding of it included both intellectual as well as practical activity. We have already seen that Al-Ghazālī had attributed the body of knowledge in "ethics" to the discoveries of the mystics and not the philosophers. This and related knowledge is what he meant by the "intellectual" activity in *ṣūfism*. He studied this aspect of *ṣūfism* in the works of such great *ṣūfis* as al-Muḥāsibī, Abū Tālib al-Makki, and by what he learned about al-Junayd, al-Shibli, al-Bisṭāmī, and other leading *ṣūfis* through anecdotes and oral discourses.

From these studies, he discovered that the most distinctive feature of *ṣūfism* was something which could not be apprehended by study alone, "but only by immediate experience (*dhawq* — lit. 'tasting'), by ecstasy and moral change."<sup>39</sup> This was the practical and active aspect of *ṣūfism* which consisted of "getting rid of the obstacles in the self and in stripping off its base characteristics and vicious morals."<sup>40</sup> This kind of self-discipline is an essential aid in the pursuit of truth. In other words, the knowledge of truth presupposes the achievement of a particular state within one's being, without which it is impossible for one to be free to know reality and God. The knowledge of reality and of God assumes a quality of the whole personality of the knower, whereby truth becomes an immediate "receptivity" of the knower. The pursuit of truth is not merely a pursuit of intellectual perplexities in order to discern the true from the false but, along with such pursuit, every aspect within the whole personality should be carefully fostered and disciplined. The acquisition of truth and the development of self-discipline are intimately interdependent and neither one is possible without the other. This is, in brief, the kernel of the philosophy of *ṣūfism*.

In contrast with the knowledge received through the intellect in philosophy or scholastic theology, the knowledge received in *ṣūfism* is through *dhawq* (immediate experience). Thus "what a difference there is between *knowing* the definition of health and satiety, together with their causes and presuppositions, and *being* healthy and satisfied!"<sup>41</sup> Similarly there is a difference between knowing the true nature and causes and conditions of a life of piety and actually leading such a life. Put in different words, this means that the knower through the knowledge

(39) *Ibid*, p. 55.

(40) *Ibid*, p. 54.

(41) *Ibid*, p. 55.



of the intellect is still separated from the object of knowledge. The knowledge acquired by this means is different from the object of knowledge itself.

The *ṣūfism* of Al-Ghazālī will become clearer as we proceed. After his studies and initial experiences in *ṣūfism*, he examined his inner motives in his teaching and his pursuit of knowledge and realized that his life was actually devoted to satisfying the desire for an influential position and public recognition. But, in order that his pursuit might become free, his whole personality should be divested from all motives save the desire for God. Other ends which a person aspires to achieve through the acquisition of knowledge are themselves barriers to truth. In order to overcome being moved by such ends, and thus not barred from the knowledge of truth, a series of moral transformations becomes essential.

Al-Ghazālī, therefore, resolved to divest himself of any adverse circumstances that might demand his attention. This resolution was not easy to fulfill and for six months (Rajab 488 A.H. / July 1095 A.D.) he was "continuously tossed about between the attractions of worldly desires and the impulses towards eternal life."<sup>42</sup> At the end of this period, he became very sick. He could no longer speak and his power to digest and assimilate food and drink was impaired. The doctors gave up all hope of successful treatment and decided that his "trouble arises from the 'heart' (i.e. the psychological, not the physical heart), and from there it has spread through the constitution; the only method of treatment is that the anxiety which has come over the heart should be allayed."<sup>43</sup>

He "sought refuge in God", and God "answered (him)." He then left Baghdad, his teaching position, and his family, after providing for them, and became a wandering *ṣūfī* in Syria, Palestine and Hijāz for a period of ten years.

In the space of these ten years,

... there were revealed to (him) things innumerable and unfathomable ... I learnt with certainty that it is above all the *ṣūfī*; who walk on the road of God; their life is the best life, their method the soundest method, their character the purest character; indeed, were the intellect of the intellectuals and the learning of

(42) *Ibid*, p. 57.

(43) *Ibid*, p. 58.

the learned and the scholarship of the scholars, who are versed in the profundities of revealed truth, brought together in the attempt to improve the life and character of the *ṣūfīs*, they would find no way of doing so; for to the *ṣūfīs* all movement and all rest, whether external or internal, brings illumination from the light of the lamp of prophetic revelation; and behind the light of prophetic revelation there is no other light on the face of the earth from which illumination may be received.<sup>44</sup>

The *ṣūfī's* beholding of reality and God is incommunicable. The words give little clues to what they mean; for words are signs for the conventionally known things, and what they behold is not conventionally known.

(44) *Ibid*, p. 60.



## CHAPTER II

### REASON AND REVELATION

Al-Ghazālī introduces his monumental work, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, by warning that he is not writing for the purpose of formulating in words religious truths. In this context and others his main reasons for this warning are the following.

The knowledge of these truths is incommunicable and can only be a private discovery. Attempts to formulate them in words would only be misleading. Words cannot convey their reality, for words have been invented to express conventionally known things, and these truths are not conventionally known. In conveying truth, language follows the rules of the intellect, and "religious" truths defy such rules. An understanding of "religious" truths presupposes a plane of development in the reader in which all the constituent elements of his knowledge are related. Religious truths belong to this plane in which knowledge becomes an undivided whole within the person. The understanding of any religious truth presupposes such a whole. Its expression in words is not possible, for expression fails to convey its relationship to the whole in a meaningful manner and, therefore, is bound to be misleading for those who do not already possess this relationship within themselves. Finally, formal religion in the scriptures may seem to contradict these truths for those who do not take into consideration that the scriptures were addressed to all levels of understanding and, consequently, involved all types of reasoning. This last problem is a very serious one, for it raises the question of how does the *Qur'ān* embody truth and is it identical with truth; therefore, it will be discussed in detail later.

For these reasons, which were common among the *ṣūfīs*, it was considered sinful on the part of those who did achieve a mystical plane of knowledge to attempt to express this knowledge or, at any rate, to try to convey it beyond a circle of individuals of similar achievement. The *ṣūfīs*, or for that matter other men of knowledge, felt a deep personal responsibility for the kind of ideas their teachings might produce in the minds of their audience — and their audience included everyone.



On the whole, the '*ulamā*' (men of knowledge) were extremely sensitive to *what* should be discussed and *how* it should be communicated to a particular audience. Their teachings were supposed to be responsible for the ideas and beliefs in religious matters of the rest of the members of the Muslim society. And, although each member in this society was personally responsible to God for the kind of ideas and beliefs he or she maintained, the majority depended, for lack of time and training, upon the teachings of the '*ulamā*'. These '*ulamā*' themselves were very much aware of this function in society and, consequently, were very sensitive to the ability of their audience to comprehend certain issues, as well as to the type of reasoning peculiar to the minds of such an audience.

Now on a mystical plane of understanding, what is known is a knowledge between oneself and God. A person possesses this knowledge as a private treasure when he is in immediate contact with reality. This knowledge is not a body of systematized ideas which can be organized in language and then communicated to a mind of similar organization. The contact between the mystic and the object of knowledge is intimate and immediate, and systematization and words prevent such intimacy. What a mystic can write down or teach is the "way" to achieve intimacy with reality, but not a description of reality. Such a contact is established as a result of the removal of all that "veils" the spirit from reality. These "veils" include sensual observation and even intellectual reasoning. They also include all those habits, traits and worldly goals which preoccupy the individual's intelligence and, consequently, prevent his freedom. When the spirit is released from all such distractions, it is no longer separated by the "veils" of the illusions of the senses and the intellect from reality, nor is it turned away from the right direction by the personality of the individual and what preoccupies it. At this level of being, the knowledge grasped is called *mukāshafah* (immediate disclosure). *Mukāshafah* is thus "the ultimate goal of those who seek truth and whose ambition is to establish their belief upon certainty."<sup>1</sup> Absolute certainty in truth is possible only at this level.

The direct experience of the objects of knowledge is the ultimate end of religion. The highest object of knowledge is God. Men cannot learn such direct knowledge from others — not even from the prophets. Thus :

(1) *Ihyā' 'Uum al-Dīn*. Introduction.

The elimination of all doubt, the disclosure of reality and the knowledge of things as they really are, and the comprehension of the secrets translated by the external form of the words of this religion (Islam) cannot be available except to the ardent seeker of truth who has eradicated the discords of contending lusts within himself, set himself wholeheartedly to nought but God, and thought constantly in order to purge the contents of his thought from any traces of conflict.<sup>2</sup>

All this, in addition to "exposing" oneself to the divine "breathings" (*nafuḥāt*) of guidance, was essential. This "exposure" awakens "the human spirit by the Divine Spirit in proportion to the purity and degree of receptivity and preparedness of the former."<sup>3</sup> This "exposure" is referred to in:

And your Lord saith, call me and I respond to your call.<sup>4</sup>  
and in :

And when My servants ask thee concerning Me, then I am nigh unto them and answer the call of him that calls upon Me.<sup>5</sup>  
and in :

We have created man, and We know what his soul whispers within him, for We are nearer to him than his jugular vein.<sup>6</sup>

The knowledge received in this "awakening" is called *ilhām*. But *ilhām* is not prophecy or "revelation" (*wahy*). "Revelation" is a divine linguistic expression of the Unseen in order to be conveyed to mankind as the Message of God, while *ilhām* is only an "exposure" of the human self to the Unseen. The former is peculiar to the prophets, the latter to anyone to whom God wishes happiness. In *ilhām* :

There is no medium between the self and the Creator. *Ilhām* is similar to light falling on a pure, distilled and 'subtle' heart... [*Ilhām* is sometimes mistakenly translated as "intuition"]. If God the most High wishes good for someone, He lifts the veil between his self and the Universal Self which is the Eternal Law (*al-Lawḥ*).

(2) *Ibid*, p. 171.

(3) *Al-Risālah al-Laduniyyah*, p. 28. (Collection of Essays, Cairo, 1907).

(4) *Qur'ān*; 40 : 62.

(5) *Ibid*, 2 : 182.

(6) *Ibid*, 50 : 15.



Then some of the secrets concealed in the Universal Self appear, and their meanings as they are inscribed in it. This Self expresses them as it wishes for those to whom God wishes. Human wisdom is attained only by this knowledge (*'ilm laduniyy*; lit. knowledge from [God]), and unless man achieves this stage, he is not wise, for wisdom is a gift from God: 'He giveth the Wisdom to whomsoever He willeth. He to whom the Wisdom has been given, has been given manifold good, but none are reminded except those of insight.' 7<sup>8</sup>

Thus what Al-Ghazālī proposes to write is only what he can systematize and communicate in words, i.e. what others can receive and learn from other human beings. This communicable knowledge is *mu'āmalah*. This kind of knowledge cannot exceed the ken of the intellect as a representation of reality, for expression has to obey rules, and the rules of the intellect are the highest means of communication in words. Thus, while *mukāshafah* means a personal intimacy and knowledge of truth, *mu'āmalah* indicates, first, self-discipline according to the discoveries of the former, and second, the body of systematized knowledge which leads to *mukāshafah*. This, however, is not the only relationship between the two kinds of knowledge, for *mu'āmalah* is derived from *mukāshafah*. How then can *mu'āmalah* be the road to something of which it is a derivative? This problem is one of the great mysteries of human nature and its development.

Insofar as the individual is concerned, his acquisition of *mu'āmalah* starts with the imitation of what has been collectively accepted, i.e. he starts with the imitation of other Muslims who follow the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah*. Then, through his personal experiences and knowledge, he may achieve the level of *mukāshafah*. The *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah* themselves embody the results of the *mukāshafah* of the Prophet as these results have been expressed by God Himself for all levels of understanding. Thus, in his period of imitation, the individual seeker acts according to the results of *mukāshafah*, though without understanding them fully. The linguistic expression of *mukāshafah* in the *Qur'ān* is exactly what makes it a miracle, for such an achievement is humanly impossible — even for the Prophet.<sup>9</sup> This is the significance of the *Qur'ān* to the Muslims and this is what has made it their source of inspiration as well as their object

(7) *Surah*, 2 : 272.

(8) *al-Risālah al-Laduniyyah*, pp. 29-30.

(9) See *Ihyā'*, "Al-Haqīqah wa al-Shar'", in the Book of Knowledge (*'Ilm*).

of investigation throughout the ages. Besides, the *Qur'ān* declares that there remained no necessity for more prophetic "revelation", i.e. a divine linguistic expression of truth. What has remained is *ilhām*, i.e. a direct "exposure" to truth, and whatever assists in understanding the *Qur'ān*.

The majority of men are not required to seek or attain a *mukāshafah* level in their understanding of the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah* as a condition for their salvation. But for those who desire such a level of understanding, it is achieved only at the "prophetic" stage of development. In every age, there is a group of these "godly men, of whom God never denudes the world."<sup>10</sup> The essential reality of truth, as it has been embodied in the language of the *Qur'ān*, is disclosed at this level. The question of the embodiment of truth in the language of the *Qur'ān* is discussed later.

Now *mu'āmalah* itself is divided into the knowledge of the visible (*ẓāhir*) and that of the invisible (*bāṭin*).<sup>11</sup> The former is concerned with the overt actions of the body and its members or, in other words, "behavior"; the latter deals with the life and activities of the heart (spirit) as it lives in the body in this world or, with that theoretical body of knowledge necessary to guide the individual in his quest for truth. The main object of *mu'āmalah* is then to study the relationships between the visible and the invisible with a view to understanding the proper functioning of every aspect in the human personality and, consequently, its cultivation and discipline to perform its intended function. This necessarily involves the study of the proper kind of relatedness between the human personality as a whole and the outside world, which necessarily leads to the study of the outside world itself. All this knowledge is essential to prepare the individual's personality for the attainment of *mukāshafah*. If the attainment of truth involves the achievement of a disciplined harmonized personality, the fostering of such a personality involves a complete knowledge of human nature as well as the world outside. Knowledge, therefore, has the double function of first, progress to self-fulfilment, and second, a progressive means to the knowledge of God. Both functions are fulfilled in one and the same process.

What belongs to the visible aspect of behavior is the knowledge of customs and acts of worship (*'ibādāt*); and what belongs to the invisible is the knowledge of all the "sciences" (*'ulūm*). Among these sciences there is a hierarchy of importance corresponding to the hierarchy of man's

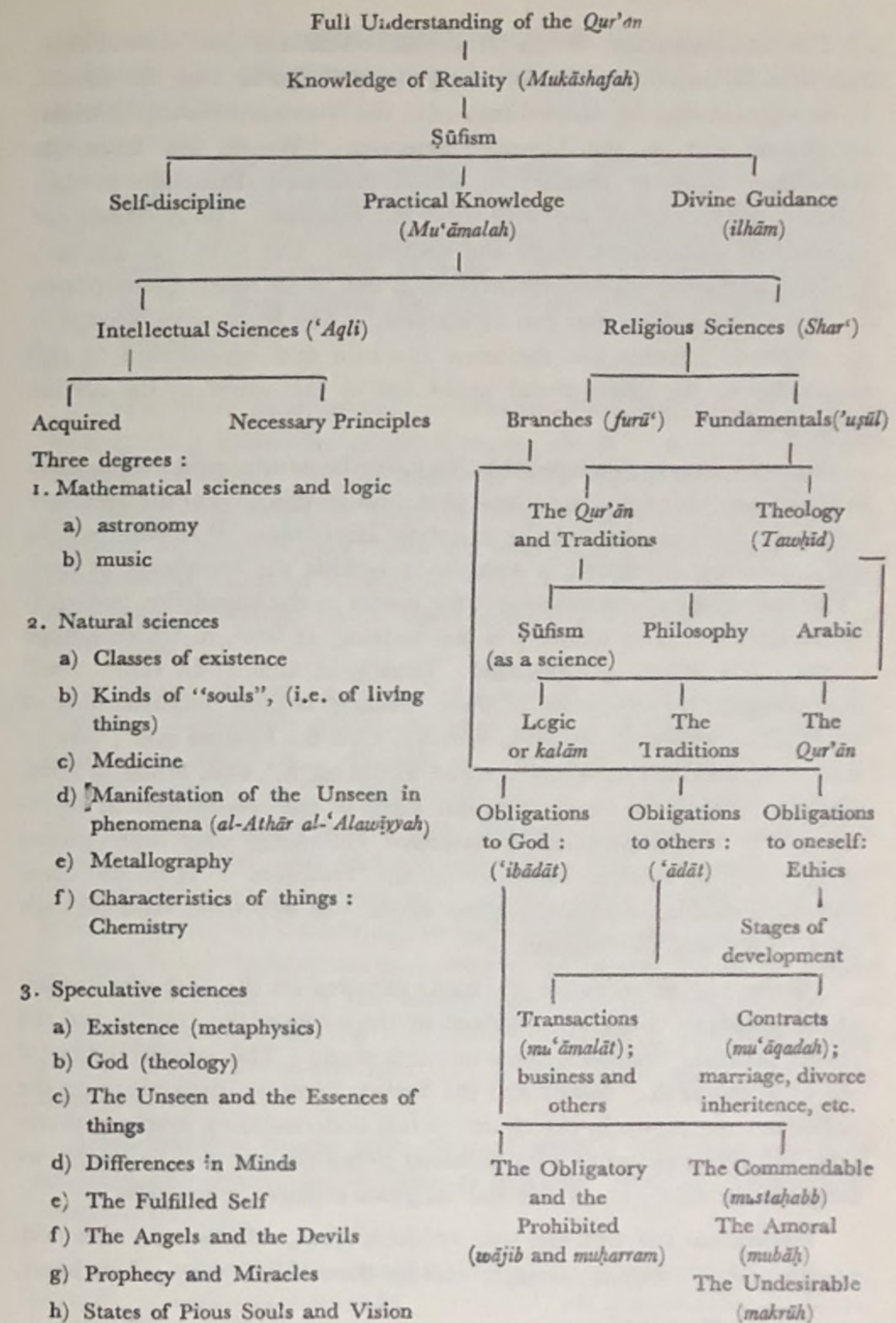
(10) *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*, p. 38. ✓

(11) *Ihyā'*; Introduction, p. 5. ✓



ends. They may be divided into: (1) the *intellectual*, i.e. those whose objects are "ascertained by the faculty of the intellect ('*aql*)", and (2) the *religious*, i.e. those whose objects are embodied in the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah*, and which are *ultimately* ascertained by mystical experience.

The following chart illustrates one of Al-Ghazālī's schemes of knowledge. It is primarily intended to show the relationship between the intellectual and the religious sciences and their union in *ṣūfism*. Al-Ghazālī gives other schemes serving other purposes. The scheme in the Book of '*Ilm* (science), the first Book of the '*Ihyā'*', mirrors the social order — in the sense that a particular science or profession (*ṣinā'ah*) is required for the performance of each of the various services needed in this order. This scheme is concerned with *dunyā* (worldly life), while the one charted here is concerned with the education of the heart.

AL-GHAZALI'S SCHEME OF KNOWLEDGE<sup>12</sup>

(12) *al-Risālah al-Laduniyyah*, pp. 15-23.



The understanding of the intellectual sciences is not arrived at by imitation of beliefs nor by the study of the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah*. These sciences may be divided into : (1) the Necessary Principles which are innate, and (2) the Acquired Sciences. "We do not know the immediate origin or manner in which Necessary Principles occur", although we know they are with us in our creation. The Acquired are obtained by experiment, study and deduction. The term "Acquired", however, applies to both the intellectual as well as the religious disciplines, i.e. to any knowledge that can be learned. The body of knowledge in the acquired sciences has the same function and relationship to *ṣūfī* knowledge as the phenomenal world has to the world of the Divine Kingdom.<sup>13</sup>

Although man is predisposed by his *fiṭrah* (the nature implanted in him) to know God, "he cannot draw near God through this *fiṭrah* or the necessary principles, but only through the 'acquired' knowledge."<sup>14</sup> In other words, the acquisition of sciences is essential in seeking the knowledge of God. "The knowledge of the universe is the ladder to the knowledge (*ma'rīfah*) of the Creator. The universe is the 'writing' of God, in which Divine truths are inscribed or embodied. Intelligent men of all ranks 'read' the universe. The meaning of their 'reading' is their understanding of the Wisdom which the universe conveys. God the Exalted said : 'Say — Reflect on what is in the heavens and in the earth.', and, Praise to Him, He said : 'We shall show them our signs in the worlds and in themselves.'"<sup>15</sup> The importance of acquired knowledge over other means of approaching God is indicated in the Tradition : "If people draw near God through all sorts of good deeds, you approach Him through your (acquired) intelligence."

"Religious" sciences are originally received on the authority (*taqlīd*) of the prophets. They are acquired by the study of the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah*, and the necessary tools for such study. The understanding of the meaning of the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah*, however, depends upon the entire scheme shown in the chart. A full understanding involves, therefore, the achievement of a harmonized personality as well as the knowledge of the intellectual and the religious sciences, plus *ilhām*.

Intellectual sciences are not, by themselves, sufficient for this end. In other words, they are not sufficient for the self-fulfilment of the heart,

(13) See Chapter IV below.

(14) *Ihyā'*, p. 1372.

(15) *Qur'ān*, 41 : 53.

"although the heart needs them." Nor, on the other hand, can revealed knowledge be understood without the assistance of the intellectual sciences. Thus,

... the intellect cannot dispense with revealed knowledge, nor can revealed knowledge dispense with the intellect ... Therefore, a person who advocates sheer *taqlīd* without the use of the intellectual sciences is ignorant, and he who is satisfied with these sciences alone without the light of the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah* is conceited.<sup>16</sup>

The intellect, as an instrument of knowledge and revealed knowledge, as a guiding source for religious truths, stand in need of each other. Wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*) is the result of their combination. Even the specialized disciplines in religious sciences cannot dispense with the intellect, for some of their truths are inferred or deduced by it from the fundamental truths of revelation, while some others are the result of analogical reasoning based upon similarly established beliefs and convictions.

Theology occupies a pivotal position in the organization of the sciences. Al-Ghazālī places theology as a sub-division of Speculative Knowledge, which is a division of intellectual sciences, and also as a subdivision of the Fundamentals (*'uṣūl*) of the religious sciences. That is, the intellectual and the religious meet and are united in theology. All the other sciences and their various branches serve as introductory material to theology.<sup>17</sup> *Ṣūfism* combines both the religious and the speculative aspects of theology. Speculation is an activity of the intellect. But, in its fundamental contents, speculation has to be guided by revealed truths. For the individual seeker, therefore, there are two necessary sources of learning : (1) human teaching, i.e. the intellectual discoveries of mankind; and (2) divine revelation which guides these discoveries.<sup>18</sup>

Unfortunately, in the cases of most seekers, these two sources of acquired knowledge, the intellectual and the religious, are mutually opposed, for

... he who devotes all his efforts to one of them in order to

(16) *Ihyā'* p. 1374.

(17) *al-Risālah al-Laduniyyah*, p. 5.

(18) *Ibid*, p. 23-26.



fathom its mysteries is in most cases shallow in the other. The combination of perfect *insight* in both worldly matters (chief domain of the intellectual) and religious matters, is almost impossible except for those whom God has established in knowledge that they may guide His mankind in their living as well as their destiny. These are the prophets who are supported by the Holy Spirit.<sup>19</sup>

This passage distinguishes between the actual prophet and the ordinary person who may achieve the "prophetic" stage of development in knowledge. The latter, besides being lower in rank in this stage itself does not possess the authority of active guidance to mankind. This same passage also indicates that the office of the prophet is both "temporal" and "religious". All spheres of life are united and all point to the same end. But what is subtly implied in this passage is an attack on that class of *ṣūfīs* who claimed that the knowledge of the "intellectual" sciences was not required to achieve self-fulfilment. It is, at the same time, an attack against the "intellectuals" who supposed that revealed truth was not necessary to guide the intellect towards this end.

Self-fulfilment, or happiness, is built upon two sources of knowledge. One source is the "*shar'ī*", i.e. that which is acquired from the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah*, and the other, the "intellectual" (*'aqlī*), or that which is acquired through the intellect. But these two sources are not really distinct, for "to him who knows it, most *shar'ī* knowledge is *'aqlī*, and to him who understands it, most *'aqlī* knowledge is *shar'ī*."<sup>20</sup> When the outside unity of these two sources is also united in the individual seeker, then he is essentially a *ṣūfī*.

This kind of inter-dependency and unity between the intellectual and the "religious" describes the personality of Al-Ghazālī himself and his type of *ṣūfism*. He combined within himself the capacity for mystical experience as well as the rationality of a powerful intellect. He gave his spirit free rein without letting his beliefs and tenets degenerate into pure emotionalism. He placed his spirit above his intellect, but he has always retained his intellect to have a degree of control over his ecstasy.

After this Al-Ghazālī recapitulates his discoveries of the nature of knowledge in his theory of prophecy, which is actually the core of his

(19) *Iḥyā'*, pp. 1375-6.

(20) *Al-Risālah al-Laduniyyah*, p. 15.

theory of knowledge. *Al-Munqidh* expounds some of the fundamental ideas of this theory. These and other ideas are scattered in other writings. In Al-Ghazālī's theory, almost every human being is originally endowed with the capacity to achieve the *rank of prophecy* in knowing truth. The phenomenon of "prophecy" is not something supernatural, imposed upon man without any basis in his nature to "receive" it. Given the capacity of human nature, "prophecy" is a natural phenomenon. The miracles associated with prophets before Muḥammad were not an integral aspect of "prophecy", but were only a means of gaining the confidence and trust of the people that they might be more receptive to the Message of their prophet. The actual prophet is a man to whom the essential nature of things has been revealed (or in the *ṣūfī* language "unveiled"). This first aspect of prophecy, i.e. the "revelation" of the essential nature of things, is not peculiar to the actual prophet, and is theoretically possible for all others. Those who achieve this aspect are the *wālīs* or *muqarrabūn*, i.e. those who are nigh to God. The true prophet, in addition, however, is commissioned with the improvement of mankind, which distinguishes him from the *wālīs* and all others.

The substance of man in his original condition "was created in bareness and simplicity without any information about the 'worlds' of God most high."<sup>21</sup> What Al-Ghazālī means by "worlds" is simply "classes of existents". Man's information about existents is by means of perception. Every perception of perceptibles acquaints man with a particular "world" or with a particular "class of existents". Thus touch, the first instrument created in man for his acquaintance with reality, perceives certain classes of existents such as "heat, cold, moisture and dryness, smoothness and roughness". But *touch* cannot apprehend colors or noises and, as far as it is concerned, these are non-existent. Next, *sight*, *hearing* and *taste* are created in a consecutive order, each informing man of a class of existents peculiar to it. Other senses are then created "until man has completed the world of the sensibles."<sup>22</sup>

Then man goes through a fresh stage in his development. About the age of seven, the faculty of discernment (*tamyīz*), i.e. the power of distinguishing and differentiating, is created in him. He now apprehends relations which do not exist in the world of senses. From this stage he then ascends to a higher stage, that of the intellect

(21) *Al-Munqidh*, p. 63.

(22) *Ibid*, p. 63.



(*'aql*). He apprehends through this faculty "things necessary; possible, impossible, things which do not occur in the previous stages."<sup>23</sup>

But the intellect is by no means the highest stage in man's development. For there are still worlds, or "classes of existents", which the intellect cannot apprehend and which, as far as it is concerned, are non-existent. Beyond the ken of the intellect there is still the stage in which man "beholds the Unseen". This is the stage of "prophecy".

Just as intellect is one of the stages of human development in which there is an 'eye' which sees the various types of intelligible objects, which are beyond the ken of senses, so *prophecy* also is the description of a stage in which there is an 'eye' endowed with light such that in that light the unseen and other supra-natural objects become visible.<sup>24</sup>

Those who reject the stage of prophecy and disregard the truths of prophetic revelation do so out of sheer ignorance, for it is only because they themselves have not achieved this stage that its objects are non-existent for them.

In his *Mishkāt*<sup>25</sup> which is devoted to the explanation of the famous 'Light-Verse' and the 'Darkness-Verse',<sup>26</sup> Al-Ghazālī terms the faculties of knowledge "the Spirits Luminous". All of these "spirits" are 'lights', for "it is through their agency that every sort of existing thing is manifested."<sup>27</sup> They gradually come into existence as the infant is growing up. The later, and therefore the more mature the faculty, the higher it is as an instrument of knowledge and the wider is its sphere of "classes of existents." The first one is the "sensory spirit", which is the root and the origin of the "animal spirit" and constitutes the differentia of the animal genus. The second is the "imaginative spirit" which is the recorder of the information received through the senses. It keeps that information filed and ready at hand, so as to present it to the "intelligential spirit" above it. The "imaginative spirit" is not found in the infant at the beginning. No conflict of desire arises in him for an object out of his sight. An older child may cry for it or ask to have it, because its image is then preserved in his imagination. This faculty

(23) *Ibid*, p. 64.

(24) *Ibid*, p. 65.

(25) *Ibid*, pp. 81-83.

(26) *Qur'ān*, 24 : 35, 40.

(27) *Ibid*, p. 84.

is not possessed by all animals.

Although animals also perceive the objects of senses and imagination, "mankind possesses a different, more refined and higher species of those two faculties, they having been created in man for different, higher and more noble ends". In animals they were created only as instruments of acquiring food, and for subjecting them to the service of mankind. But in man "they were created to be a net to chase a noble quarry through all the present world; to wit, the first principles of the religious sciences."<sup>28</sup>

As the child grows up he acquires the "intelligential spirit" which is characteristically a human faculty. It apprehends ideas beyond the spheres of sense and imagination, and is not subject to space or time, such as axioms of necessary and universal applications. Beyond this faculty is the "discursive spirit", which takes the data of pure reason and combines them, arranges them as premises, and deduces from them informing knowledge. Then it may take two or more conclusions thus learned, combine them again and learn a fresh conclusion. It so goes on multiplying itself *ad infinitum*.

Each of the above "spirits" has its proper objects of knowledge. Each has its inherent laws of knowing which correspond to and select its objects of knowledge, thus limiting its sphere among the totality of the knowables. The "discursive spirit" is the highest faculty admitted by the non-*ṣūfis*. From the *ṣūfis*' point of view, man in this fourth stage is still bound by the laws of this "spirit" which separate him from the objects of knowledge, and it would be hopeless for him to attempt to know the world of the Unseen — things as they really are, and God — if this were the highest possible stage in his development. Therefore, Al-Ghazālī asks :

Why should it be impossible that beyond reason (or intellect) there should be a further plane on which appear things which do not appear on the plane of the intelligence...?<sup>29</sup>

This plane beyond that of the intellect is "the prophetic spirit". He who does not develop beyond the plane of intellect should not make the degree of his personal achievement the criterion of his judgment on this question. Such a person is not competent to judge this matter adequately.

(28) *Al-Munqidh*, p. 84.

(29) *Ibid*, p. 82.



Al-Ghazālī, an educator at heart, reminds us to consider some examples analogous to the prophetic spirit, taken from the "gross phenomena" of daily experience. There are some persons who exhibit extraordinary gifts in poetry, music, or those special talents which particularize individuals. These gifts are due to a general "intuitive" faculty in such persons. There are others in whom this faculty is completely lacking. The effects of poetry or music only occur strongly in one who has a powerful intuitive faculty for them. Their effects are proportional to the degree of sensitivity in this faculty and its development. But he who is destitute of it originally "hears the sounds (of music, for example) just as much as the others, but the emotional effects are by him only very faintly experienced, and he exhibits surprise at those whom they send into raptures or swoons."<sup>30</sup> In this last case all the professors of music would be powerless to make him understand the meaning of this musical sense.

All this means that acceptance presupposes understanding, and complete understanding requires immediate experience. If someone did not accept the existence of the "prophetic spirit" in man, that person failed to develop his understanding of it through experience, and has wrongly made himself the measure of human perfection.

Thus, the men who deeply understand the "prophetic spirit" are those who have developed it and actually experienced it. Their knowledge of it is "mystical". There are others who may accept it through analogies like the above. Their knowledge of it is "scientific". Finally, there are those who simply have faith in it. These are the degrees of knowledge in general. "Scientific knowledge is superior to faith, and *dhawq* (mystical experience) is superior to knowledge (*ilm*, science). The province of *dhawq* is ecstasy, that of (scientific) knowledge is ratiocination, and that of faith is bare acceptance by imitating and trusting men of ecstasy and men of knowledge."<sup>31</sup>

Now these various degrees and kinds of knowledge correspond to similar degrees of self-fulfilment or to personality types. They, therefore, become the criteria for a classification of men into ranks according to the development of each. They also become the criteria for a classification of doctrines, religions and sects, according to the degree of development each doctrine, religion or sect enables the individual to achieve. These criteria, in Al-Ghazālī's scheme, do not merely classify

(30) *Ibid*, p. 83.

(31) *Ibid*, p. 133; see also *Al-Munqidh*, p. 62.

"Muslims", but are universal and apply to all "non-Muslims" as well. In other words, here is a complete philosophy of religion which furnishes us with a comprehensive scale to rank all human beings and their creeds. According to this scale, many "non-Muslims" would be higher in rank than many "Muslims." What an individual "becomes" is more important than what an individual professes. Thus, Al-Ghazālī begins at the bottom of the scale and works up the knowledge-ladder, giving us in his *Mishkāt* a gradation of all human beings and all human creeds according to their approach to God and absolute truth.

Al-Ghazālī's criteria for classification and his theory of knowledge as a whole cannot be fully understood without consideration of the intimate relationship between the processes of knowing and self-disciplining. These criteria and the classifications they imply are postponed until the end of the next chapter.

The most distinctive feature of Al-Ghazālī's *ṣūfism* as a theory of knowledge (as of most types of mysticism) is that it insists that the apprehension of reality depends on the receptivity in the knower which is influenced by every aspect of his personality. Man as knower is at the same time man as being, and both aspects are an indissoluble whole. At any stage in his development, the individual's depth of insight and the degree to which he understands correspond to a state of being within his total personality. What are known as "instruments of knowledge", including the "mind", are not independent of the whole personality, and cannot be detached from the other constituents of the personality as the "faculties" of knowledge or the only things that count in establishing contact with reality. Every aspect of the personality besides the "faculties" of knowledge — the habits, desires, emotions, personal traits, personal goals and interests — are all involved in the process of knowing.

Thus, in Al-Ghazālī's theory, knowledge is inseparable from the entire personality of the knower. The degrees in an individual's development reflect not only the corresponding abilities to know but, at the same time, the kinds of habits and goals and the kind of balance that the particular individual has established between the various aspects of his personality. The pursuit of truth is an inter-dependent and dynamic process between learning and experience on the one hand, and the cultivation and discipline of everything within one's personality, on the other. The pursuit of truth is religion, for it has to go hand in hand with self-discipline according to the highest religious values and ideals. Neither the ability to know nor the desire to become good can



develop fully without each other. Knowledge and morality are inseparable, and the quality of the one reflects the quality of the other.

Al-Ghazālī's *ṣūfism* is by no means a life-denying or a "fact-avoiding" attitude of the mind. It is rather that additional step beyond "reason", when the rules of reasoning are no longer adequate to know the realm of knowledge which defies these rules. Religion has to be rooted in empirical knowledge, but empirical knowledge alone cannot answer all the questions of religion. The place of God as the ultimate goal of the seeker serves as the Universal Principle which justifies a particular philosophy of man with a particular set of values and ideals.

To understand Al-Ghazālī's theory of prophecy (or of knowledge, for prophecy is a stage in knowledge), one should supplement this discussion by an investigation of his philosophy of man, and the possible developments within human nature according to this philosophy. However, these matters constitute the subject matter of the next chapter.

Some very serious problems arise from Al-Ghazālī's scheme of knowledge and his doctrine that the ultimate source of truth is revealed religion. First, if the highest degree of knowledge is that of *mukāshafah* which is not communicable (or should not be communicated in words), how then does the language of the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah* (from now on referred to as *Shar'*) express reality? Second, if the knowledge of truth depends ultimately upon revelation, then is human reason (intellect) capable of knowing what is beautiful (good) and ugly (evil)<sup>32</sup> independently of revelation? Third, what is the proper place of *fiqh*<sup>33</sup> in the whole scheme of sciences? *Fiqh* had until then usurped the highest place among "religious" sciences. Al-Ghazālī not only deprives it of this place of honor, but removes it from the "religious" sciences and adds it to the "worldly" sciences.<sup>34</sup> And, finally, there was the fanatic zealotism to particular schools of thought and sometimes violent divisions within the Muslim society according to these schools. The problem here is by what criteria should one claim that one's system of knowledge is better and, consequently, convict of heresy or unbelief

(32) In Arabic the terms *ḥasan* and *qabīḥ* literally mean "beautiful" and "ugly" but in contexts of ethics mean "good" and "evil".

(33) *Fiqh* is the science by which *Shar'* has been interpreted into formulated norms of conduct as guides and restraints in particular situations in the various aspects of life. Usually it is translated as "jurisprudence", although its scope is much wider than what the latter indicates to a Westerner.

(34) *Iḥyā'*, p. 30 f.

others who do not follow one's system?

The first, second and third questions will be discussed consecutively in this chapter with most attention devoted to the first two questions.

The first question, namely, the embodiment of truth in *Shar'* in actuality is only the question of the method of interpreting the *Shar'*. There was never any disagreement among Muslims that the *Shar'* was the embodiment of truth. Al-Ghazālī divided the various schools of thought into two extremes according to their methods of interpretation. One extreme ignored all literal interpretations and claimed that truth is "hidden" (*bāṭin*) in the words, which should, therefore, be understood only allegorically. The opposing school, the representative of which was Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, denied any interpretation other than the literal meaning (*ẓāhir*). The followers of this school were "fundamentalists."

Al-Ghazālī's position on this serious problem is summarized in the following passage:

An adequate rule between this extreme laxity [of allegorism] and the extreme rigidity of the Ḥanbalites is subtle and obscure, which only those who enjoy divine help and who comprehend matters by divine light and not by hearsay, can see. When the mysteries of things lie bare to them as they really are, these men then examine the language of the *Qur'ān* and the Traditions and the terms employed there. Whatever agrees with what they have seen by the light of certainty (*yaqīn*), they affirm (literally); and whatever differs, they interpret allegorically. But he who acquires his insight of these matters merely from the bare wording (*sam'*), will thereby fail to find a secure resting-place and a well-defined standpoint. It is safer for the one who depends upon mere *sam'* to adopt the position of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, may God have mercy on his soul.<sup>35</sup>

This method of distinguishing between what should be interpreted allegorically and what should be taken literally involves Al-Ghazālī's complex process of seeking truth. The seeker must start with the *Shar'* and, in order to understand it, should study the intellectual and religious sciences, as well as discipline his personality to free his intelligence from whatever veils or distracts it in order to acquire complete experience (*dhawq*) of the real. After this process, the seeker becomes

(35) *Iḥyā'*; p.



able to distinguish by *himself*, and chiefly by himself, between what is a symbolic expression of reality in *Shar'* and what is a literal expression. The judge is the light of certainty.

But does this solve the problem for those who do not seek truth in such a manner, or for those who do not achieve the plane of certainty? In respect to these persons, the *Shar'* then either is not what it appears to be in language, or it is not in complete agreement with reality. Does Al-Ghazālī then divide the *Shar'* into the exoteric and the esoteric, or into that which is obvious to most minds and that which is mysterious to these minds? Such a division would "almost be contradictory to the *Shar'* itself."<sup>36</sup>

Know that no one with insight (*baṣīrah*) denies that religious truths are either obvious or obscure. Only those who are feeble, those who have learned something in their early youth and then closed [their minds to receive further knowledge], deny this distinction.<sup>37</sup>

Al-Ghazālī finds support for this distinction in the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah* themselves. He quotes many texts, including:

These are parables We coin for the people, but only those who have knowledge understand them.<sup>38</sup>

Some of the Traditions he quotes are:

We the prophets are commanded not to address people except according to the level of their intelligence.

Some knowledge is similar to what is concealed, no one knows it except those who know God.

There are three main degrees of knowledge which correspond to the three planes of understanding which the man of learning (*'ālim*) possesses. Only the first two can be communicated. Thus, there is

... a knowledge which is explicable (*ẓāhir*) which the learned man (*'ālim*) teaches to those whose understanding is of the *ẓāhir* level; a knowledge which is *bāṭin* (concealed) and which he should not expound except to those of its rank; and a knowledge which

(36) *Ibid*, p. 171.

(37) *Ibid*, p. 171.

(38) *Qur'ān*, 29: 42.

is between himself and God the Exalted which he does not expose to anybody.<sup>39</sup>

But such a scale is still too vague and general to solve the question of how to interpret the language of *Shar'* in particular texts. It may be that the differences between the language of *Shar'* and reality are differences of contradiction, and, if this were true, then some of the *Shar'* would be false. But if nothing in the *Shar'* is false, then why such a distinction between the "literal" and the "allegorical" expressions of truth in its texts? If the *Shar'* is a true expression of reality, why not expound the so-called secrets of the *Shar'* to everybody?

Al-Ghazālī felt that this would lead to "great disaster". But to leave the questions completely unanswered was perhaps more dangerous. Complete answers were to be found only through mystical knowledge (*mukāshafah*) which the individual discovers for himself and which human language cannot transmit. The language of the *Shar'* as an expression of truth and belief is primarily directed to the heart as the source of conduct. This language is intended to possess the heart and lead it to accept the principles in *Shar'*. But the knowledge of reality which is embodied in this language is something which is not required (by *taklif*) from all human beings. Such knowledge is a property of the inmost secrets of the heart which only the devoted few become able to comprehend privately.

To prevent any misunderstanding, however, that the linguistic this expression in *Shar'* contradicts the Unseen reality, Al-Ghazālī discusses this problem in brief. He divides the hidden secrets which only the select few (*muqarrabūn*) fully possess into five classes, the knowledge of which depends upon the immediacy and depth of experience.<sup>40</sup>

In the first class is knowledge so subtle that most understandings are incapable of conceiving or comprehending it. It is the duty of the few (*khawāṣṣ*) who become able to comprehend it not to try to convey their personal *dhawq* (immediate experience) of it except to the *khawāṣṣ*. To divulge such knowledge would be disastrous for the others, for their understanding fails to comprehend such an object of knowledge and any words they hear will only confuse them or even undermine their settled beliefs. The concealment of the secret of the spirit (*rūḥ*), and the Prophet's refusal to explain its nature

(39) *Iḥyā'*, I, p. 173.

(40) *Ibid*, pp. 174 ff. The quotations which follow are translated from these pages.



belong to this class.<sup>41</sup> Most understandings are incapable of its comprehension, and most imaginations fall short of conceiving its essence.

It should not be imagined that the secret of the spirit "was not disclosed to the Prophet himself, for he who does not know the spirit is as if he does not know himself, and he who does not know himself, how can he know his God?" Similarly, such knowledge is disclosed to some servants of God (*awliyā*) and some *'ulamā* who have achieved an intimate knowledge of God. But, following the example of *Shar'* (the Prophet's silence in this context), they remain silent where *Shar'* is silent. In other words, the *Shar'* mentions things which belong to this class but does not attempt to explain the reality of such things. This task is left for the ardent seeker himself.

The Attributes of God also belong to this class of objects of knowledge. The *Shar'* did not describe these Divine Attributes except in language which is familiar to the understanding of people, such as Knowledge, Power and other commonly understood words. Most people understand these Attributes by a kind of comparison and imagine them similar in nature to human knowledge and power, for they themselves possess such qualities called "knowledge" and "power". They imagine God's Attributes by this kind of analogy. But if the *Shar'* described some of God's Attributes in some way which men could not compare, they would not be able to understand or accept such descriptions. The pleasure of sexual intercourse, for example, if mentioned to a child, would not be understood by him except by a comparison to his pleasure in food of which he has an immediate understanding. This kind of knowledge by analogy is not a description of reality, but only suggestive of some of its aspects. Now the differences between God's Knowledge and Power and those of men are far greater than the differences between the pleasure from sexual intercourse and that from eating. Yet the analogy supplies most people with some basis for their imagination of the nature of God.

The passage which immediately follows suggests the kernel of Al-Ghazālī's theory of knowledge, in that all knowledge of the outside is introspective. In the next chapter we shall see that the highest degree

(41) The Prophet was asked by the Jews as to the nature of the spirit. He remained silent and abstained from giving any answer. It was later revealed "And they ask thee of the spirit. Say: 'the spirit belongs to my Lord's *Amr*; but of knowledge only a little to you is given'." (*Qur'ān*, 17:87).

of certainty, or "objectivity", is actually the highest degree of introspective knowledge.

In brief, Man does not apprehend except himself and those qualities of himself which are present at the moment or those which he has already experienced. Then by analogy to [this knowledge] of himself, he understands the same about other [objects of knowledge]. He may then believe that there are differences between himself and other objects of knowledge in honor and perfection. It is not within man's ability to attribute to God except that which he has established about himself concerning action, knowledge, power and other qualities — with the additional belief that these qualities are more perfect and more honorable in God. Most of man's search [lit. circling] is centered around himself and not around what is peculiar to God in Majesty. For this reason the Prophet said: 'I cannot be comprehensive in praising You [i.e. describing You adequately], You are what You have praised Yourself'. This Tradition does not mean that 'I am incapable of expressing what I have comprehended', but it is an admission of the Prophet's incapability of comprehending the essence of His Majesty... Thus Abu Bakr [the First Caliph] has said: 'Praise be to God Who did not make any way for mankind to know Him except by the impossibility of knowing Him.'

The second class among the mysteries of reality which the *Shar'* did not explain and, consequently, concerning which the prophets and the pious refrained from divulging their personal knowledge, are those objects of knowledge which the understanding is not incapable of comprehending, but whose publication would be harmful to most people, though not to the learned few.

The real secret of Fate (*qadar*) belongs to this class, which men of knowledge were forbidden to disclose. For it is not improbable that the accessibility of some knowledge is harmful for some people in the same manner as the light of the sun is harmful for the sight of bats ... How could this be improbable when we say that unbelief, adultery, disobedience and all evils are ordained by God and that His Will and Volition are just in respect to Himself?

Some minds which are not trained and disciplined to understand the real secrets of Fate interpret these ideas to indicate blasphemy on the



part of those who utter them, that they are contrary to intelligence, and that those who maintain them have resigned themselves to everything and accept the ugly (*qabih*, 'evil') and the unjust. Or, if the secret of Fate is accessible to all,

... most people would erroneously imagine it to incapacitate them from free action for their understandings would be incapable of comprehending what removes such an imagination.

The third class includes those objects of knowledge which, when mentioned explicitly, can be understood without any harm or misunderstanding or any harm to the listener. But, instead of expressing these matters literally, they are alluded to by metaphor or symbol, so that the power in the expression leaves a deeper and stronger impression in the heart of the listener. In these cases it is to the benefit of the listener that the words reach the depths of his heart. The recognition of this class of expressions and the uncovering of the bare truth they embody can be done either through rational evidence, or through the evidence of *Shar'* itself. As to rational evidence, it is used when the literal interpretation of an expression is impossible and absurd. However, even in certain texts where the literal interpretation is reasonable, there is evidence in the *Shar'* that the intended meaning is other than the literal. Such a case is reported in the interpretation of:

He sendeth down water from the heaven and valleys come down in flood each in its measure, and the flood bears scum on top; from that over which men light a fire to get from it ornament or useful articles, comes a scum like it; thus doth Allah coin [a simile for] the true and the false; the scum disappears as rubbish, what is of use to the people remains in the earth; thus doth Allah coin parables...

Is he then who knows that what has been sent down to thee from thy Lord is the truth, like he who is blind?<sup>42</sup>

The meaning of this verse (18) could be interpreted literally according to reason, but it has been reported that the Prophet interpreted it symbolically. Thus the word "water" symbolizes the "*Qur'ān*", for both are acts of Mercy and each gives "life" — the water to organic growth, the *Qur'ān* to growth in knowledge. The word "valleys" is a

(42) *Qur'ān*, 13 : 18, 19.

symbol for the "hearts" of human beings; and the phrase "each in its measure" refers to the different individual abilities to receive and hold knowledge. The word "scum" is a symbol of falsehood and hypocrisy, for scum is only surface deep and not stable. What remains is the real and symbolizes guidance.

The fourth class in the hidden secrets of the language of *Shar'* belongs to the difference between an outlined general knowledge of what the words indicate and an immediate knowledge of the details of what they indicate. The degree of knowledge in the latter case corresponds to the immediacy and depth of experience (*dhawq*). When something is known by *dhawq*, so that "it becomes an integral aspect of the knower's consciousness", then its knowledge is *bāṭin*, i.e. private and personal and cannot be fully communicated to others. All objects of knowledge in respect to the knower are either understood in general as wholes or in detail as personal experience. These represent two degrees of knowledge, the former is like knowing a fruit through observing the skin, the latter like tasting its flesh (*lubb*). Thus, in this sense, every object of knowledge has a *ẓāhir* degree of understanding and a *bāṭin* degree.

The degree of belief in anything is equivalent to the degree of understanding. It is illuminating to observe that Al-Ghazālī uses the terms "understanding" (*idrāk* or *fahm*) synonymously with the term "belief" (*īmān*) and applies the latter to all objects of knowledge. In his theory of knowledge, "belief" is not limited to the acceptance of spiritual matters, but extends to everything. Every object of knowledge is an object of belief. When the knower's knowledge of it becomes immediate *dhawq*, then "belief" becomes certainty.

This is equally true of the various aspects of the human personality as objects of knowledge. Thus, for example, "a person may believe in the existence of love, sickness and death before these occur (to him). But his understanding of them after they occur is deeper than his understanding before." A person has, regarding desire, love and other complex compounds of his emotions and appetites, three different states corresponding to three different degrees of comprehension. First, his belief in the existence of a certain emotion or appetite before it occurs to him; second, his experience of it at the time it occurs; and third, his memory of it after it has passed. Thus, for example, a person has three kinds of understandings of hunger — before it occurs, when it occurs, and after it has been removed.



The case is similar to a religious object of knowledge; it may (finally) become a *dhawq* (an experienced "taste") and thus the knowledge of it becomes complete. Such knowledge is *bāṭin* (private and deep) in relation to the knowledge of the same thing before *dhawq*.

Individual differences in the degree of understanding of objects of knowledge in all the four classes discussed are, therefore, primarily due to differences in the depth of personal experience. In none of these objects of knowledge does the "private" knowledge contradict the literal expression (*ẓāhir*). "The private experience, however, completes and perfects the *ẓāhir* in the same way that the inside of a fruit completes its skin. And peace (be with you)."

And, finally, "the fifth class [in the hidden secrets of the language of *Sharʿ*] are expressions of the 'language' of the state of being in the language of words". Only persons of feeble intelligence may, in these cases, stop at the words and take them literally. To this class of expressions belongs God's statement:

Then He straightened Himself up to the heaven, which was then smoke, and said to it and to the earth: 'Come, obediently? or unwillingly? Both replied: 'We come obediently.'<sup>43</sup>

The quotation above refers to the beginning of creation. "A stupid person reading this verse and lacking in understanding may attribute to them [the heavens and the earth] life and mind and understanding of the address, and that this address is voice and words which the heavens and the earth hear and then reply in words and voice: 'We come obediently.' " A person of insight knows that there was no actual dialogue in words. The dialogue in the language of this verse describes a state of existence and informs that the heaven and earth move of necessity and obey the laws which God has ordained for them. Another statement which belongs to this kind of expression is:

There is nothing that does not give glory in His praise, but ye understand not their giving glory.<sup>44</sup>

"(This means) that everything in this perfected universe is witness to its Creator of the beauty of His ordering and the perfection of His

(43) *Qurʾān*, 41: 10.

(44) *Ṣūrah*, 17: 4-6.

knowledge, not by uttering 'I testify' in words, but by its existence and state of being." Viewed this way, the knowledge of anything enriches one's knowledge of the works of God, and ultimately of God Himself.

We now turn to a discussion of the second problem stated above, namely, whether human reason (intellect) is capable of knowing the beautiful (good) and the ugly (evil) independently of *Sharʿ*. This problem has been since the beginning of the second century A.H. a source of bitter debates between the "rationalists", particularly the Muʿtazilites, and the orthodox schools of thought.

The Muʿtazilites maintained that actions were either intrinsically beautiful or intrinsically ugly. They also maintained that the knowledge of some of these actions was innate and belonged to the order of necessary principles. In other words, reason knows them independently of revelation. Reason, for example, does not need the authority of revelation to be certain of the absolute beauty of saving a drowning person or others faced with grave danger, nor does it need this authority to know the absolute beauty of gratitude or the absolute beauty of speaking the truth, the absolute ugliness of ingratitude or the absolute ugliness of lying when a lie does not serve a beautiful end. According to these schools, also, other actions which are not absolutely beautiful or absolutely ugly are judged and known by reason's own speculation; such as the ugliness of saying the truth when it is only harmful or the beauty of lying when it is only useful. A few actions only are judged and known on the authority of tradition (*samʿ*), such as the beauty of prayer, the pilgrimage and other religious obligations.

Thus the Muʿtazilites and some philosophers left to the authority of revelation only this third class of actions. This class of actions has, according to them, "a quality peculiar to their nature which includes the subtle grace (*luṭf*) of God which restrains from evil and induces to the beautiful; reason cannot perceive this quality independently [of revelation]".<sup>45</sup> Concerning this class of actions, Al-Ghazālī is in agreement with the Muʿtazilites. But as to whether reason is capable of knowing and deciding upon what is absolutely or relatively beautiful, and what is absolutely or relatively ugly independent of revelation, he is in disagreement and follows the line of orthodoxy, though with fresh arguments.

(45) *Al-Mustasfa min ʿIlm al-ʿuṣūl*, Al-Amīriyyah Press, Būlāq ʿCairo, 1322 A. H., pp. 55-56. The quotations which follow are translated from these and the following pages.



These arguments shall be presented in full for they are the best we have encountered in orthodox literature against "rationalism". It should be noticed that Al-Ghazālī, in refuting the claims of the "rationalists", does not argue as a mystic but, as is true in every case when he tries to refute a certain school of thought, he follows the method of reasoning favored by that school, and presents its position in the most objective and accurate manner.

First of all, Al-Ghazālī analyzes the different usages of the terms "beautiful" (*ḥasan*, good) and "ugly" (*qabīḥ*, evil). He finds that there are three main usages. The first is the common-sense popular usage. Ordinarily men divide actions into those which agree or disagree with their self-interest. The former they commonly call beautiful; the latter ugly. People are usually indifferent to actions in which they have no immediate interest. Thus, if a certain action is favorable to one person but unfavorable to another, it is considered "beautiful" from the point of view of the former and "ugly" from the point of view of the latter. So that the killing of a strong king is "beautiful" in relation to his enemies and "ugly" in relation to his loyal followers. This method of judging actions is similar to the ordinary way by which people judge others. Thus a man who admires beautiful faces or beautiful voices usually admires the person who possesses them; whereas if this man is repelled by the looks of another person, he judges him as bad. There may be an individual by whose looks one person is repelled while another is attracted. This same individual is bad for one, good for the other. Some people may be attracted by a certain complexion while others may be disgusted by the same complexion. Their judgments of persons are expression of their personal likes and dislikes.

In brief, according to popular usage, the beauty or ugliness of actions as well as human forms and qualities actually expresses the self-interests or personal inclinations of the person making the judgment — a judgment which is extrinsic to the action or the person concerned.

The second usage of these terms is that which is in agreement with the legal (*sharʿ*) norms. Thus, in accordance with this law, God's actions are all beautiful, whether these actions are favorable to self-interest or not. The person who conforms to these norms is judged good on the mere basis of his conformity. A non-conformist is obviously judged bad. What the law has commanded, whether the command is obligatory (*wājib*) or commendable (*mandūb*), is a beautiful action. But what it has left permissible (*mubāḥ*) or where it has remained silent, then

the action is amoral and no ethical judgment is attached to it.

The third usage is to attach an ethical judgment to all that a person voluntarily does. Thus the term "beautiful" is applied to all that he may legitimately do, including amoral actions in the second usage above.

In all the three usages, the bases of judgment are external to the action or form, and reason cannot discover them independently. According to this analysis, if the law did not exist, then no action could be distinguished from another except by its agreement or disagreement with self-interest. The beauty of an action depends upon external relations and is not an intrinsic quality in the action itself.

But at this point Al-Ghazālī does not feel that he has even faced the problem which the Muʿtazilites raise, and thus repeats their arguments in the following manner. They tell him :

We are not in dispute with you on these relational matters nor on these usages ... But we still claim that the 'beauty' of an action and the 'ugliness' of another are intrinsic qualities, and that they are perceived by reason of necessity in some matters, such as injustice, lying, ingratitude and ignorance. Therefore, we do not attribute any of them [those just listed] to God as the *real* cause because of their intrinsic ugliness. We make any of them forbidden (*ḥarām*) to all rational men before the existence of divine law (*sharʿ*), because they are ugly in themselves [i.e. regardless of whether law forbade them or not, men know they should not do them]. How could this be denied when all rational men are unanimous about their ugliness without relating them to a particular situation or another ?

This passage contains one of the serious points of contention between orthodoxy and the "rationalists" or Muʿtazilites. For it raises one of the most important issues in the history of Muslim theology. Orthodoxy has maintained that God is the real Cause and Creator of everything including *all* kinds of action. Now if ugliness or beauty are intrinsic to the action itself, then, according to the "rationalists", it is the person who acts who creates evil, and God does not create it. But if ugliness is only an external relation and the action *per se* is amoral, then "ugliness" or "beauty" are terms relative to human beings only, and God would still be the real Cause and Creator of everything — a position which orthodoxy insisted on maintaining in order not to attribute to God any co-partnership. Otherwise, if evil actions are ugly in themselves, then who



creates them? If God does not create the "evil", then there should have to be a co-creator with Him who does.

The second important problem pertains to the justification or necessity of revelation to guide human conduct. If, according to the Mu'tazilites, reason can independently know and discover the good and the evil, then the scope of revelation should be limited, as far as actions are concerned, to rituals (*'ibādāt*).

Al-Ghazālī begins by listing his points of disagreements with the Mu'tazilites. He disagrees with them on three points : first, whether beauty or ugliness are intrinsic qualities; second, whether rational men know the quality of actions of necessity; and, thirdly, whether the unanimity of rational men constitutes proof.

The first of these three points Al-Ghazālī refutes through the following problem. If killing is taken as an illustration, the position of the Mu'tazilites is that it is ugly in itself unless it is preceded by murder or succeeded by a divine reward. They maintain that it is permissible to kill animals, and that such an act is not evil because God "shall reward the animals for this in the Next Life."

But killing in itself has only one reality and it does not become different, whether it is preceded by a crime or succeeded by a reward. The difference between one killing and another is only due to the benefits and interests served. It is due to something outside the killing itself. So, too, is the case with lying. Then, how does an intrinsic quality in an act change from one situation to another, unless it is not there in the first place?

As to their second claim, namely, that rational men know the ugliness of an action through reason of necessity, how could it be true "when we are disputing about it?" When rational men disagree as to whether some knowledge is necessary or not, then this itself is proof that such knowledge is not necessary.

Finally, their third claim that the unanimity of rational men constitutes proof of what is beautiful and what is ugly is false for the following reasons. First, unanimous agreement does not necessarily mean that such agreement is due to necessary knowledge which is innate to the nature of reason. Second, men have agreed on the existence of a Creator and the possibility of prophecy, with some few dissenters. But, even if these dissenters did not exist, unanimity alone would not prove the truth

of these matters. If agreement in these two matters is analysed we shall find that some men agreed on the basis of testimonial evidence, others on the basis of imitation, and some professed agreement to dispel any suspicions about themselves. In other words, even those who agree on an issue do not always do so because the knowledge of that issue is necessary.

The rationalists (*Mu'tazilites*) might argue their case using the following examples : first, a man is confronted with a situation where saying the truth and lying are equal, so far as his self-interest is concerned. In such a case, self-interest is eliminated. Yet this man will prefer the side of truth. This can only be due to an intrinsic beauty in saying the truth. Another problem is the case of a powerful king who is a disbeliever (i.e. his knowledge of beautiful actions is not derived from revealed law) and who happens on a weak person whose life is in danger. This king will be disposed by the nature of his rationality to save that person. The king does not believe in religion and so does not expect a reward in the Next Life, nor does he care for the gratitude of the helpless man. It may even happen that saving this man's life goes against the interests of the king or brings trouble to him.

Now Al-Ghazālī answers :

We do not deny the commonness of such situations among mankind, or that such actions are not well-known and moral, but we insist that the bases [of these actions] are either in the acceptance of religion, belief in secular laws, or in self-interest. We except only God from this, for He is the only One Who has no interests.

But for men, their common agreement on the beauty of such acts proceeds from their self-interest. However, self-interest in a particular situation "may be too subtle to detect by ordinary investigation". Only an extremely alert investigator (*muḥaqqiq*) may recognize it. The sources of error in the Mu'tazilite's thinking in the two examples above are three.

The first error is due to the fact that man generally judges a thing "ugly" when it does not agree with his personal interest even if the same thing is favorable to others. Human nature as such is so deeply engrossed with itself that it rarely recognizes others equally with itself. It usually belittles them. Human beings even condemn a non-living object and



attribute "ugliness" to the essence of that object if it did not satisfy their self-interests. Thus it happens that the same person judges the same object as "ugly" in one situation and "beautiful" in another.

The second error is due to the overlooking of rare exceptions. No action commonly known as "ugly" is always and in every situation bad. But exceptions may be rare and thus may not even occur to the mind when a general judgment is made about that action. But, due to the predominant association of such an action as being contrary to human self-interest, a quality of "ugliness" is attached to it and, consequently, it is judged as being intrinsically and absolutely "ugly". The persistence in this kind of judgment and the frequency of characterizing this action as "ugly" produce an attitude of repulsion which becomes deep-seated in the mind. So that even when a rare occasion occurs, such as where lying, for example, serves a good end, the mind nevertheless finds itself repulsed by it. The absolute ugliness of lying has been presented to the mind since childhood as a means of character-forming and guidance. Its goodness in certain situations has been neglected in the education of the mind. Its absolute badness is thus planted so early in life that the mind in its natural growth is not likely to notice or examine the falsehood in such a principle. Moreover, if exceptions to absolute ugliness are brought before this mind, such exceptions may be too remote from its immediate interests and, as far as this person is concerned, all lying would be ugly. Such a person continues to believe in the absolute evil of lying and persists in his claim that ugliness is intrinsic to lying, irregardless of external factors.

The third error is due to the habit of "fancy" (*wahm*) which inverts causal relationships:

A certain value is usually observed to be connected with a thing; then it is 'fancied' that that thing is necessarily and always connected with that value, without the knowledge that though a particular is always connected with the general, the general is not necessarily always connected with it.

Many concrete examples illustrate this erroneous reversal of causal relationships. But what is of interest to Al-Ghazālī in this context is not the logic involved but rather the human psychology. His aim is to show that it is not in *reason* that man's sense of the "beautiful" and the "ugly" originates, but rather in his self-interests. Al-Ghazālī maintained that not only does "fancy" have a strong hold over behavior, but that

man's sense of the "beautiful" and the "ugly" originates in "fancy".

A common illustration of the decisiveness of fancy is the strong repulsion some people retain toward a particular food because of a harmful experience in the past. Their "fancy" connects the harm with that food in all situations. This fancy may be so strong that even when their intelligence advises to the contrary, it would still not be possible for them to accept that food. Another example of fancy is the immediate repulsion a person who has been bitten by a snake exhibits when he sees a colored rope, for this person has experienced deep injury from such a picture and fancies that the injury is connected with the picture. "Human nature was created to obey its fancies even when intelligence knows they are unfounded."

This human trait also underlies men's judgment of others as well as their acceptance or rejection of certain ideas. Thus, if a person has a disliking for a certain name and then happens to meet a woman who is beautiful but has that name, his judgment of her is colored by his dislike of the name. Or, when a person is presented with a true and noble idea, he accepts it. But when he is told that the original source of that idea was a certain person or a particular school of thought which he happens to suspect or dislike, then he is most likely to reject the idea originally presented or, at least, not to accept it as wholeheartedly as he did before he knew its source.

This habit of accepting or rejecting ideas is not peculiar to average people but is also true, and even more so, of most of those persons who claim knowledge and identify themselves with a particular line of thought. Only those who are well versed in the sciences may be safe from it. Thus :

Most people actually follow their fancies, even when they are unfounded and, what is more, most of their affirmative decisions [to do something] and their aversions are rooted in their fancies [rather than in their reason], for fancy has a stronger rule over human nature.

Now, how does this analysis support Al-Ghazālī's thesis that reason does not know of necessity the "beautiful" and the "ugly" in actions which are almost universally accepted to be "beautiful" or "ugly", and how does he attribute the judgment of these same actions to personal interest rather than to rational thinking? And, how does he attribute the origins of the norms of the "beautiful" and the "ugly" to *Shar'*



rather than to human reason?

An action such as saving someone from drowning is universally accepted as beautiful, and, therefore, fancied to have originated in reason. But Al-Ghazālī maintains that this action is preferred to indifference, due to the fancy of identification with the drowning person. This identification is due to a human sensitivity from which it is not possible to detach oneself. The person who observes another in a disastrous situation fancies himself in that situation and, precisely because of his self-preservation instinct or interest, condemns an observer who does not rescue the person in danger. He then applies this process of his fancy to himself as an observer in the situation where someone else is actually drowning or in danger. And, in order to avoid the pain of his fancy that he, himself, will not be rescued when in danger, he tries to rescue the person actually in danger.

But suppose the observer does not possess that sensitivity which underlies this identification with others. Such a person is not conceivable but, even if he were, there are still other incentives of self-interest which would motivate him to rescue others. A powerful incentive is the expectation of reward and praise for a deed that saves the interests of others. And, if it is supposed that no one will know that he was the rescuer, he will still, inside himself, expect others to know. But, if the place where the rescue occurs is desolate and it would be impossible to expect anyone ever to know of his act, the expectation still remains, for fancy in this situation is stronger than what the intelligence knows. The existence of this expectation is similar in nature to the repulsion that the person who was once bitten by a snake feels towards the colored rope. The rescuer in a desolate place has already learned that rescue is connected with reward and praise and, consequently, fancies that reward and praise are connected with rescue in every possible case.

Al-Ghazālī arrives at the following general principle in human judgment of the beautiful and the ugly. "Whatever is generally associated with pleasure is fancied pleasant in itself; and whatever is associated with pain is fancied painful in itself."

This same analysis is what underlies human approval of such qualities as endurance, courage, the keeping of others' secrets, the fulfilment of promises ... etc. "Men contrive to commend them, due to their personal interests discussed above."

But, even if Al-Ghazālī's analysis of the source of human ethical judgment is accepted, there still remains the problem of why the norms

of the beautiful and the ugly should be defined by *Shar'* rather than by human beings. What this analysis has done is to substitute one human faculty for another in the knowledge and justification of what is almost universally judged beautiful or ugly. If human reason is not the source of ethical judgment, according to this analysis, human fancy takes its place. Then why should revelation be necessary as the source of ethical judgment?

Al-Ghazālī does not ask these questions in this context, but the answers are there, nevertheless, in his other writings. We have to remember that *al-Mustasfā* (in which this whole problem of ethical judgment is discussed) is a book on the philosophy of jurisprudence (*'uṣūl al-fiqh*), and action is viewed primarily from a jurist's standpoint.

Yet even in this context we should realize what he means by "self-interest is too subtle to be detected". Although there are certain actions where there is a most universal agreement as to their beauty or ugliness, regardless of whether reason knows them of necessity or not, and regardless of whether the beauty or ugliness are intrinsic or not in the action itself, most human actions do not fall under this category. If self-interest is the origin of judgement in the latter cases, then what would actually judge between human beings or guide them in their judgments are norms which would subtly embody such things as power, influence, trickery, etc. In order to avoid such injustice, the source of these norms should be disinterested, i.e. not human. This is the position of Al-Ghazālī the jurist.

But from the standpoint of Al-Ghazālī the *ṣūfi*, the norms of ethical behavior serve more and nobler purposes than mediating justice between human beings. They are a necessary aspect of self-discipline which, as we have seen and shall see in more detail, is essential in the pursuit of truth. In order to serve their function properly in self-development, the norms of action should originate from the *mukāshafah* level of knowledge, i.e. ultimately, from revealed truth.

From a legal view, which applies to all Muslims, actions are *amoral* unless limited by law. Thus there is the principle, generally accepted by orthodox jurists, that liberty in action is absolute unless limited by law (*al-aṣl fī al-'umūr al-ibāḥah*). God has limited this original liberty to preserve human society from the dangers of the appetites and lusts of its members. The literal meaning of a legal norm is "limit" (*ḥadd*), i.e. a "boundary" which either includes the desirable action or excludes the undesirable. The legal "limits" comprehend a very small area of human behavior. On the positive side, certain things are obligatory



(*wājib*); on the negative, other things are forbidden (*ḥarām*). But these are the two extremes and in between them lie three degrees of optional behavior: (1) the commendable (*mustaḥabb*, lit. the lovable), (2) the amoral or neutral (*mubāḥ*), and (3) the undesirable (*makrūh*, lit. disliked). Thus, from a legal standpoint, the spirit of Muslim law grants human action the widest of development. But from a *ṣūfī* standpoint, every action counts in self-development.

In his attempts to reconcile faith and reason and unite them in *ṣūfism*, Al-Ghazālī had to face one of the most disturbing problems among the various schools of thought in Muslim society; namely, the extreme zealotism of some of the followers of some of those schools and their recklessness in condemning others and accusing them of disbelief and heresy.

We have already mentioned that Al-Ghazālī considered zealotism one of the great barriers in the quest of truth, and we have seen his bitter attacks on the obdurate attitude of the scholastic theologians (*mutakallimūn*) towards the writings of the philosophers or of others who did not agree with them. But what was worse than the obduracy of the theologians was its counterpart, their self-righteousness in self-appointment accusing of heresy or disbelief all those who did not follow their particular school of thought. Some of these theologians, according to the authority of Al-Ghazālī himself, went to such extremes that "they have accused of disbelief all the masses of Muslim peoples on the grounds that 'he who does not know theology (*kalām*) as we know it, and he who does not establish the principles of his faith according to our demonstrations, which we have written down, is a disbeliever.' " Such men, Al-Ghazālī continued, "have not only narrowed down the boundless Mercy of God and have limited salvation to a small circle of theologians (*mutakallimūn*), but even have been ignorant of what has been established and received down from the *Sharʿ* itself."<sup>46</sup>

In this regard, Al-Ghazālī tried to restore the original spirit of Islam which had been almost lost in the bitter debates between the Muʿtazlites and Orthodoxy.<sup>47</sup>

(46) *Fayṣal*, p. 79.

(47) On the debates and statements of the various sects and schools of thought which divided the Muslim society into bitter factions, and which involved the most serious issues in the history of Muslim theology, such as: predestination and free will, the Unity and Justice of God and their implications for man's responsibility and his authorship of action, the connection between faith and action, God's Mercy and Forgiveness...

According to the *Sharʿ*, God is the only judge of the sincerity of anyone's belief, and men can never acquire any authority to judge the sincerity of a person who professes the unity of God. This profession includes the peoples of the Book, i.e. the Christians, the Jews and the Sabians and, therefore, excludes their followers from being accused of disbelief in the unity of God. What distinguishes the "Muslims" is their added acceptance of Muḥammad and his message of the *Sharʿ*. Otherwise, "Islam" in its Qurʾānic original meaning is broader than anyone among all these *historical* religions:

Nay, *whoever* surrenders [*aslama*, verb of Islam] himself to Allah, being a well-doer, has his reward with his Lord, fear rests not upon him nor does he grieve.<sup>48</sup>

Again, the *Qurʾān* is emphatic that "The religion with Allah is The Surrender [Islam to His will and guidance]", and that Muḥammad's duty was "only to convey the message [of God]."<sup>49</sup> The sincerity of "surrender" is between man and God, and the *shahādah* that "There is no god but Allah" is only an overt declaration which other human beings have to accept at its surface value.

Thus, a famous Tradition relates the story of Usāmah ibn Zayd who said:

The Apostle of Allah sent us on a mission to al-Ḥurakāt. The enemy got news of us and took to flight. We got hold of one of the men and when we fell upon him, he immediately declared: 'There is no god but Allah.' But we beat him till he was dead. I told this incident to the Prophet, who said: 'How will you render an account for this man's statement 'There is no god but Allah' on the Day of Judgment? I replied: 'Oh, Apostle of Allah, he said it only from fear of our arms.' Thereupon the Prophet

=etc., the best authorities are: al-Ashʿarī's *Maqālāt al-Islamiyyin*, 2 vols., ed. Ritter, Istanbul, 1929-30 A.D.; al-Baghdadi's *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, ed. Muhammed Badr, Cairo, 1328 A.H.; as-Shahrastani's *al-Milal wa al-Nihāl*, 2 vols., ed. Cureton, London, 1846 A.D.; and Ibn Hazm's *al-Fayṣal fī al-Milal wa al-Ahwāʾ wa al-Nihāl*, 5 vols., Cairo, 1320 A.H.

In English *The Muslim Creed*, Cambridge, 1932, by A.J. Wensinck is an attempt to follow the orthodox position from its early statements and to analyse its growth and development in its reactions to the important non-orthodox schools, especially the Muʿtazilites.

(48) *Qurʾān* 2: 106.

(49) *Qurʾān* 3: 19, 20.



said : 'Have you neglected to split open his heart in order to find out whether fear was his motive ? How will you account for his 'There is no god but Allah' ? The Prophet did not cease repeating these words till I wished I had not been a Muslim before.

The statement "Have you neglected to split open his heart ?" became proverbial in situations where someone suspected the sincerity of another.

Human authority to judge the belief of others would have deprived Islam of its most characteristic feature, namely, the immediacy between God and the individual. It would also have deprived the wrong-doers of the "boundless Mercy of God" and set down very tight formulae to behavior. According to the *Qur'ān*, the only unforgivable sin is polytheism :

Allah will not forgive that a partner should be ascribed unto Him, though He forgives anything short of that to whom He willeth.<sup>50</sup>

The Muslim community, as a community, was authorized to judge only specific and observable actions and according to specified "limits" (laws). But the community was never authorized to judge what human beings could not observe and measure according to the law.

The bitterness of Al-Ghazālī against those who claimed a monopoly of truth and who accused others of heresy or disbelief is expressed in the following passage :

If someone claims that the definition of disbelief is what does not accord with a particular school of thought (*madhhab*) such as that of al-Ash'arī, that of the Mu'tazilites, or that of the Hanbalites, know that such a person is conceited, stupid, and chained by his naive imitation (*taqlīd*) of others.<sup>51</sup>

Al-Ghazālī then ridicules zealots with the following questions :

How does truth become the possession of one person and not another ? ... Is it because the former preceded in time ? ... Or, is it because he is higher in honor and knowledge ? By what standards or tests does a partisan of a certain school determine the degrees of honor and knowledge that it became so clear to him that there is no one who is more honorable than his leader or master (founder of the school) ?<sup>52</sup>

(50) *Qur'ān* 4 : 40.

(51) *Fayṣal*, p. 53.

(52) *Ibid*, p. 53.

Any fanatic partisan faced with these questions will find that his grounds for partisanship are founded upon a type of reasoning no better than that of his opponents. Therefore :

Anyone who makes truth the monopoly of one specific master is himself closer to disbelief and self-contradiction [than those he accuses]. As to disbelief, he has placed his master in a position of infallibility. He thereby made sound belief only what is in accord with his master, and disbelief what is in disagreement. As to self-contradiction, every master has made speculation obligatory and, consequently, one should not believe except that which he has arrived at personally.<sup>53</sup>

The only thing that could save the Muslim community from this fanatic partisanship with its irresponsible allegations is the reestablishment of the minimum requirements of belief beyond which no Muslim could legitimately accuse other Muslims of heresy or claim that he had a superior system of beliefs. Al-Ghazālī reduces this minimum to three fundamental constituents of faith. Thus, he laid down this general principle, which is actually a restatement of the original spirit of Islam in this regard :

The fundamentals 'uṣūl of faith are three : belief in God, in the honesty of His Prophet, and in the Last Day. All other matters branch out from these fundamentals. You should know that according to the *Shar'* there is no disbelief in 'branches' (*furū'*) except in one case, and that is when one denies a Tradition which has been handed down on authoritative testimony.<sup>54</sup>

Al-Ghazālī reaffirmed the faith of the masses of people who had been made to suspect their beliefs as a result of the accusations of some arrogant theologians. Thus he reassured them :

Know that it has been disclosed to men of insight [*sūfīs*] that God's Mercy precedes His punishment and is universal ... Therefore, rejoice in the Mercy of God and hope for absolute salvation if you have combined faith in Him with good deeds.<sup>55</sup>

(53) *Ibid*, p. 55.

(54) *Ibid*, p. 72.

(55) *Ibid*, p. 87.



### CHAPTER III

#### HUMAN NATURE: ITS DEVELOPMENT AND KNOWLEDGE

Al-Ghazālī expounds his theory of the creation of the individual human being in a short essay, *al-Madnun al-Ṣaghīr*<sup>1</sup>, where he tries to explain the Quranic verse: "And when I fashioned him [the human individual,] I breathed (lit. blew) into him some of My spirit."<sup>2</sup> Only the first part of his essay contributes to our present purpose, for in it he explains the terms used in this verse. Thus:

*Fashioning (Taswiyah)* is the process which occurs in matter to make it suitable to receive the spirit. This matter is the quintessence of clay in respect to Adam; it is the human germ-cell (*nutfah*) in respect to his descendents. The germ-cell becomes what it is after passing through numerous stages, starting with clay. The clay is transformed into food (through plants and animals), the food into blood, and blood into a male's sperm and a female's egg.<sup>3</sup> The male's sperm then is united with the female's egg in a "receptacle sure".<sup>4</sup> In the womb itself the result of this union goes through a long process of transformations until it finally achieves a harmonious constitution (*jibillah*) and becomes suitable to receive the spirit. Until this time it is only "matter". It is only this "matter" which the human individual inherits from the human species. Each individual receives the spirit directly from God. The spirit itself comes into existence the moment the constitution of the embryo becomes ready and suitable to receive it.<sup>5</sup> At the instant of the meeting between the spirit and the receptive body, a new creature, the human being, comes into existence.

Second,, *breathing (nafkh, lit. blowing into)*, "is what 'ignites' the

(1) This essay is printed on the margin of *al-Insān al-Kāmil* of al-Jilānī, pp. 89-98. Quotations here refer to these pages.

(2) *Qur'ān*; 15 : 29, 38 : 72.

(3) Al-Ghazālī distinguishes between the sperm and the egg by prefixing either "male" or "female" before the word *nutfah*.

(4) *Qur'ān* 23 : 12.

(5) Such a theory would facilitate the acceptance of birth control by the Muslims of today on religious grounds, for birth control takes place *before* the human being is created.



light of the spirit in the fashioned body."<sup>6</sup> This stage in the existence of an individual requires two pre-conditions which are necessary for any individual thing to exist: first, the generosity of God which flows (*tafīdu*) as the cause of everything that comes into existence; and second, a certain constitution in the receiver of this generosity to accept a particular individuality. The individuality of a thing is the result and is in accordance with the divine generosity, which implies the divine Knowledge, Will and Power to create, and the suitability of a certain matter as an agent to receive the desired individuality. The latter condition is an aspect of the perpetuation of the processes of nature which were created by God in the beginning of creation (*sunnat allāh fi khalqih*). Thus at every step in the becoming of an individual, there is the active generosity of God and the history of creation at that moment.

The relationship between God's generosity (*fayḍ*) and the receiving matter is similar to that between the light of the sun and the objects capable of reflecting it. Without giving up any of its own substance, the sun lights receptive objects. In this sense, God is "the Light" of the whole universe.<sup>7</sup>

In the case of the human individual, the divine generosity which flows to him (the spirit he receives), belongs to the world of *Amr* and not the world of *Khalq*. That is the spirit belongs to the world of *direction* and *purpose*, not to the world of *extension*; and, therefore, it is not subject in its essence to the spatial or temporal condition in the world of *khalq*. The human personality is the combination of both the spirit and the body, i.e., it shares in the two worlds, that of *Amr* and that of *Khalq*.

Third, the usage of "My spirit" does not mean that the human spirit is a part of God's spirit. This usage is metaphorical and would be similar to the sun saying, if the sun could speak, "My light flows to the earth." It is a causal relationship without any substance transferred from God Himself to man. This idea is very important in Al-Ghazālī's type of *ṣūfism* for, on its basis such *ṣūfī* ideas as the possibility of human identity with God or a pantheistic concept of God are excluded. Throughout all his writings, Al-Ghazālī is meticulously consistent in rejecting these extreme *ṣūfī* ideas and in maintaining that God is essentially different from man and the world.

(6) *Ibid.*, p. 89.

(7) *Qur'ān*, 24 : 35.

Thus in the creation of man we have first the active idea or form (*ṣawwara*) in God's Light, we have the constitution of the substance of the recipient of the spirit (*jibillah*), and we have the actual coming into existence of the individual the moment the constitution of the recipient is ready to be animated by the spirit.

What distinguishes man is the nature of his spirit which is equated with his essence. The characteristics of his body and all that is generated within the human personality, as a result of the meeting of the spirit with its body, are all necessary accidents and are what they are in order to adequately serve the spirit in the fulfilment of its "Trust".<sup>8</sup> The urge to fulfill this "Trust" lies in the nature of the human spirit itself. This urge is not a matter of choice but a necessary expression of its nature. The primary reason for the creation of the spirit in a body is that "man acquires here (in this world) by the use of his bodily senses some knowledge of the works of God, and, through them, of God Himself."<sup>9</sup>

As far as the nature of the spirit is concerned, its existence in the body or in the world of *khalq* is a "descent" to a lower sphere in the order of existence. The spirit was "sent down into this world against its will to acquire knowledge and experience, as God said (in the *Qur'ān* : 'Go down from hence, all of you; there will come to you instruction from Me.'"<sup>10</sup> Yet while the spirit exists in the body, it has to seek the knowledge of the divine world and of God. Its origin was from thence, and to live the life proper to itself, it cannot settle without the knowledge of that order to which it essentially belongs. In this sense every human is by necessity an aspirant to know God. Deep down in himself, he is aware of this aspiration, for "he has in the depths of his consciousness heard the question, 'Am I not your Lord ?' and answered 'Yes' to it."<sup>11</sup>

But why does the spirit commence its career in the world of *extension* ? It is because this is the only way "to acquire knowledge and experience" of the variety of orders in all creation. In other words,

(8) The term "Trust" (*amānah*) occurs in the *Qur'ān*, 33 : 72, "... Man undertook to bear it (the Trust)." Al-Ghazālī equates this "Trust" which man undertook to bear with man's inescapable obligation to "know and experience" the works of God, which was implanted in his spirit by *fiṭrah*.

(9) *Alchemy of Happiness*, p. 43. Quotations refer to the English translation by Claude Field, *Wisdom of the East*, London, 1910.

(10) *Ibid.*, p. 54; *Qur'ān*, 2 : 28.

(11) *Ibid.*, p. 25; *Qur'ān*, 7 : 172.



man's knowledge of God after living in this world is richer than his knowledge could be if he had not come to this world at all. His knowledge of the works of God in the world of *Khalq* (extension) is not possible without living in it and being a part of it.

Therefore, the concern of the individual in his quest for truth is not merely due to a delight in intellectual pursuits. The curiosity itself is not only something inescapable but even contains the direction of its intent — the "knowledge and experience" of the works of God. On the one hand, the spirit seeks to return to its origin, on the other hand, it was sent to this world "against its will" to acquire a richer knowledge of God. The level of "return" corresponds to the degree of knowledge it acquires. Its urge to return, coupled with its inability to do so without knowledge, is the mystery of human life on earth. This mystery is God's wisdom in creating human life and death, and it is exactly what gives life on this earth its peculiar importance in man's immortal career. The human individual, not by any choice of his own but due to the nature of his spirit, lives in a constant disturbing feeling of separation and alienation from the divine world, a feeling which urges him to reflect upon and examine himself and all existence around him.

Thus, according to Al-Ghazālī, every human being is born and bound to be an aspirant to know God. This is the meaning of *fiṭrah* discussed in the first chapter. The quest for truth is a quest for what satisfies the spirit. It is a quest for the attainment of peace within one's self. This peace is achieved when man has experienced and known all levels of existence, penetrating in this process all that which originally obstructed him from knowing the world of his origin, and which had been the cause of his deep disturbance while he was alienated from that world. In his attempt to know the divine world and achieve peace, man has to know the phenomenal world first, and liberate himself from it. Every bit of knowledge is valuable, regardless of its immediate importance in man's life, for it adds to his knowledge of the works of God, enabling him to proceed on his journey to happiness. Man's happiness (*sa'ādah*) or self-fulfilment is then the crowning point of a progressive acquisition of the knowledge of things according to his expanding capacity due to his maturation. Happiness itself is the state of being which is concomitant to the individual's fulfilment of his "Trust" to God, i.e., his knowledge of God through his knowledge and experience of God's various orders in creation.

At the level of *sa'ādah* (self-fulfilment), religion is no longer that conscious obedience to the divine law, nor is it releasing oneself from the fetters of this law. It is, rather, the discovery of the ultimate source and truth of this law. As one *ṣūfī* said: "No understanding of the Holy Book is possible until it is actually 'revealed' to the believer just as it was revealed to the Prophet."

The human individual arrives in this world as a complex multi-dimensional person, containing a diversity of attributes of matter, life, intelligence and a divine spirit, "which are in opposition to one another, and hence veil him from the world of the Unseen, i.e., the world which lies beyond the ken of the senses."<sup>13</sup> Each one among man's attributes, besides being a part of the whole personality, delights in something peculiar to it. Thus, for example, "lust delights in accomplishing desire, anger in taking vengeance, the eye in seeing beautiful objects..."<sup>14</sup> Although everyone of man's attributes is essential to the pursuit of his happiness, the degree of its satisfaction should be determined by its proper role in his life as a whole rather than by an unlimited satisfaction of that in which it individually delights.

As we have already mentioned, the human individual arrives in this world without knowledge and with only his lower faculties for knowledge sufficiently developed. The faculties by which man is enabled to pursue his ends and which distinguish his human-beingness are merely latent capacities in his early life. The higher the faculty, the later its full development occurs.

In other words, man arrives in this world greatly handicapped in the pursuit of his happiness. He arrives with opposing attributes, the relationships between which are pregnant with a variety of possible developments. He arrives without any personal knowledge to guide his growth. Moreover, his more reliable faculties which could acquaint him with himself and the world are not sufficiently developed to be useful in his early life. These handicaps are at the base of man's difficulties (*mashaqqah*) in fulfilling his "Trust".

In Islam, according to Al-Ghazālī, everything in man, from his lowest appetites to his highest faculties, has its place and purpose in the achievement of his ultimate end. With the exception of the spirit, every individual attribute has a dual impulse: one, to acquire

(13) *Mi'rāj*; p. 11.

(14) *Alchemy*; p. 27.



what satisfies it individually regardless of the consequences to the development of the personality as a whole or to the pursuit of true happiness; and two, to fulfill its proper role in an acquired harmony between all that which constitutes the human personality. The former aspect of man's attributes is what makes it difficult for him to pursue his proper ends, and it is this aspect which places him on "trial".<sup>15</sup> The proper functioning of each attribute, therefore, may come about only after a long process of moral self-discipline. While on trial, the individual experiences the nature of conflicts and discords within himself. This experience serves to illuminate his understanding of the conflicts and discords within the whole world of extension. This idea, however, anticipates discussions below.

Among all the attributes of man, only the spirit "finds its special delight in the perception of truth"<sup>16</sup>. The discords within the human personality are due to the other attributes within it. Self-discipline, therefore, means the subordination of all these attributes to the service of the spirit. This subordination is not one of denial, i.e. of asceticism, but rather the development of an organic balance in man's many-sided personality. Nothing in man is to be eradicated except those excessive tendencies in some of his individual attributes to gratify their peculiar desires in violation of their proper role in a harmonized whole.

The achievement of complete integration under the dominion of the spirit is actually the first step in acquiring certain knowledge. The process of growth towards self-integration is necessary to understand certain aspects of the phenomenal world. It is also a prerequisite to polish the "mirror of understanding" and prepare it to understand the higher levels of existence. Certain knowledge, therefore, presupposes a long and tedious process of self-transformations by which the dynamic forces in the human personality mature, each facet of it learning to play its intended role in relationship to the whole and this whole coming to serve completely the directions of the spirit. Only after this stage, the light of full self-awareness may be reflected in the heart, and God may be known in the depths of Himself, and things may be apprehended in their essences. This is a state of being (*ḥāl*) in which knowledge (*ma'rifah*) is immediate, for it is "the special delight of the spirit", and it is a state in which moral conduct has become natural and effortless.

Al-Ghazālī frequently reminds us that development towards self-

(15) This is the concept of *Ibtilā'* in the *Qur'ān*.

(16) *Alchemy*, p. 27.

integration requires a great deal of experience and a thorough knowledge of human nature. Therefore, it is of primary importance for the individual who aspires for such freedom to examine the mystery of human personality and to understand its constitution. He should know the qualities, characteristics and dispositions within this personality in order to know wherein its nobility lies, and wherein lie the possibilities of its defects and ruin. He must know what appetites and lusts can possess and rule it; what motives can influence its direction; and how all these appetites, lusts and wills may be disciplined and eventually purified in order to function properly.<sup>17</sup>

As a beginner, the seeker of truth has to be an imitator. He must guide himself by his study of the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah*, memorizing their fundamental principles. He must look to the examples of those who have already discovered for themselves which are the realities and which are the vanities among things, and which are the enduring and which are the temporary and evanescent. He must learn to distinguish in the world around him between what is phenomenal and fleeting and what is Unseen and real and to comprehend the connection between them. And in relating himself to this world, he must learn the difference between his virtues and his vices.

Thus the means to attain the freedom of the spirit is twofold: one, the study of practical knowledge (*mu'āmalah*), the other the practice of moral self-discipline in accordance with this knowledge. What is meant by self-discipline (*riyāḍah*) is "the training of appetites and the control of anger so that these qualities become willingly submissive to intelligence rather than tyrannically preoccupying it merely to devise tricks for the satisfaction of their unnecessary impulses."<sup>18</sup> Practical knowledge and self-discipline combine to transform the individual from one state to a higher state, until the long and tedious process of becoming finally culminates in that of being.

Some *sūfīs* choose only the "practice" of self-discipline to achieve happiness. This method is the easier. The higher degrees in the knowledge of spiritual realities, however, depend upon the acquisition of knowledge. The deeper this knowledge, the richer is the knowledge of God and, therefore, the greater the happiness.<sup>19</sup> Thus the pursuit of knowledge is the "noblest activity of man", and, besides being man's

(17) *Ibid*, p. 14.

(18) *Mizān al-'Amal*, Kurdustan Press Cairo, 1342 A.H., p. 15.

(19) *Ibid.*; p. 49.



means to happiness, "knowledge is the quality which describes the perfection of God."<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, the "alchemy" of human happiness has then four constituents: "(1) the knowledge of the human self (i.e., spirit and body), (2) the knowledge of God, (3) the knowledge of this world as it really is, and (4) the knowledge of the Divine world as it really is."<sup>21</sup>

What Al-Ghazālī means by the "human self" (*nafs*) cannot be adequately answered in simple terms. It is the spirit and the body connected and working together. But this involves a number of questions, such as: What is the nature of the spirit itself? How is it connected with the body? What attributes are generated as a result of this connection? How do these attributes assist or hinder the development of man and his ability to know reality? Why is man created in the fashion he is? And finally, how can man utilize the whole of his personality in the fulfilment of his "Trust"?

Some of the answers to these questions have already been mentioned, but now they will be synthesized in a more detailed discussion of Al-Ghazālī's philosophy of man, his analysis of the human personality and the possible developments within it.

Al-Ghazālī's detailed exposition of the various attributes of the human personality and their respective roles in its development is primarily intended to show the various states of the spirit within the personality. This he approaches in a number of ways. First, he analyzes the human personality into its basic components. Then he traces the "natural" stages in its development, pointing out what arrests this development or diverts the whole personality from its proper growth. In all this he assumes a hierarchy of ends which governs his analysis and is the basis of his conception of the normal stages of human development as well as the arrested or perverted types of human personalities. Each of these approaches throws a different light on what we call "human nature", both its plastic elements and its inflexible characteristics. It is not possible to assemble here all the points of view which are scattered throughout Al-Ghazālī's writings. Only those which are considered comprehensive are discussed here.

In some passages, Al-Ghazālī's words may give the impression of a belief in the dual nature of man: the divine self and the animal self.

(20) *Ihyā'*, p. 21.

(21) *Alchemy*, Introduction.

Some passages even suggest a multiple nature, adding a vegetable soul and a devilish soul to the above two. Such sections, torn from the context of his system, are likely to be misleading. This is due to the various and sometimes careless usages of the word "*nafs*" (self). At one time it may be used to express an activity of life in which several attributes are involved, at another to mean "the Self" synonymously with "soul" or "spirit", but frequently to express a particular state of the spirit in the personality. Another aspect of Al-Ghazālī's writings which might be misleading in this regard is the abundant use of metaphors where human language fails to convey explicitly certain ideas concerning the nature of the human spirit and its relations to its body.

Otherwise, he is consistent in maintaining that the essence of man is only *that in him which knows*, i.e., his spirit. This spirit is "diffused" into the whole body, and the product of the "diffusion" generates qualities similar to those of animals or vegetables. But this "diffusion" does not divide man into equal components of divine, animal, or vegetable; for the generated qualities are all accidental. Thus:

If you say 'I know myself', meaning your outward shape, body, face, limbs, and so forth, such knowledge alone can never be a key to the knowledge of God. Nor, if your knowledge as to that which is within only extends so far, that when you are hungry you eat, and when you are angry you attack someone, will you progress any further in this path (knowledge of God), for the beasts are your partners in this. But real self-knowledge consists in knowing the following things: What are you in yourself, and from whence have you come? Whither are you going, and for what purpose have you come to tarry here awhile, and in what does your real happiness and misery consist? Some of your attributes are those of animals, some of devils, and some of angels, and you have to find out which of these attributes are accidental and which essential.<sup>22</sup>

Notice that his questions concerning the reality of man are questions of direction and purpose, i.e., questions pertaining to the spirit. We shall later see that Al-Ghazālī compares, in certain respects, the spirit of man in its relations to its body to that of God in His relations to the

(22) *Alchemy*; p. 19-20.



universe. In the same way that the attributes of the universe cannot be descriptive of the essential nature of God, so the attributes of the human personality cannot describe man's essential nature. But also, in the same way that the knowledge of the universe leads to the knowledge of God, so the knowledge of personality leads to the knowledge of the spirit.

However, if man exhibits a variety of qualities such as the animal, the demonic and the angelic, on what grounds are we to distinguish between what is accidental and transitory and what is essential and permanent? The answer follows from the doctrine of what is highest and peculiar to man — his spirit.

The following passages give some clues to Al-Ghazālī's conception of the essential nature of man. What is essential belongs to the invisible world and came to this world of extension as an alien or as "a traveller visits a foreign country for the sake of commerce, and will presently return to his native land..."

Some idea of the reality of the heart or spirit may be obtained by a person closing his eyes and forgetting everything around (i.e., removing from his mind any image which has extension in it) except his individuality. He will thus also obtain a glimpse of the unending nature of that individuality.<sup>23</sup>

In another context Al-Ghazālī makes the following distinctions between man in this world and man in the next. "As long as his senses remain with him he is said to be 'in this world'; when they depart, and only his essential attributes remain, he is said to have gone to 'the next World.'"<sup>24</sup> What is true of the senses is also true of all appetites and base emotions which are responsible for whatever animal or devilish attributes man has or acquires.<sup>25</sup>

Thus while the "breathing" (*naḥkh*) of the divine spirit into the receptive embryo marks the beginning of the union between what is essential and what is accidental in man, death marks the separation of the two. What remains after death is only the essential. As far as the essence of man is concerned, death is a moment which rids him of what is accidental. But at this moment, what was born as receptivity (*isti'dād*)

(23) *Ibid.*; p. 21.

(24) *Ibid.*; p. 43.

(25) *Infra*. Ch. III.

in his essential nature has become actual. The actual state of his spirit after death reflects the cumulative effects of his knowledge and actions on the becoming of his spirit while it is with the body. In other words, the essential nature of man is *that which knows*. But this nature lends itself to molding by the actual knowledge and experience it acquires in this life. It is the "alien" that comes to this world to acquire knowledge and experience.

What this "alien" acquires generates and exhibits attitudes and traits similar either to those of angels, animals or devils. Although these qualities become integral parts of the developed essential nature of man, all are acquired. What is inherent in the essential nature of man is only its disposition (*fiṭrah*) to know and seek the knowledge of God. This disposition to know, however, is flexible enough to be molded in its actual development according to the relationships established with the demands of appetite and anger. The established relationships thus reflect the actual states of the essential nature of man, and only from this point of view may this nature be described as possessing angelic, animal, or demonic qualities.

Therefore, we have to keep in mind the very important distinction between the essential nature of man as a capacity and a disposition, and the same nature as a developed entity with actual qualities, in order to understand Al-Ghazālī's insistence on the inseparable intimacy between knowing and moral self-discipline in the individual's development.

What then is the nature of the spirit which constitutes the essential nature of man? It is the "*laṭīfah rabbānīyah*" (divine subtlety) which dwells in the body. This *laṭīfah* is then differentiated by different terms according to its various activities and life in the body. But the *laṭīfah* itself, which any of the terms below indicates, is beyond the comprehension of ordinary understanding. It belongs to the world of *Amr* and therefore defies any definition or description. The individual has to discover its nature by himself. Al-Ghazālī appeals sometimes to metaphor, sometimes to analogy, and at times to symbolic language, when he speaks of the spirit. But such language can be at best only suggestive clues which may stimulate and guide the willing mind to discover the reality of the spirit. In addition to the linguistic difficulty, there is also the difficulty of the reader's ability to comprehend, which in turn depends upon his personal experience and his plane of development. The knowledge of the reality of this transcendent fact is possible



only at the prophetic stage of understanding, and therefore, presupposes complete self-understanding and full self-integration.

But for those who have experienced it, this spirit exists in itself, being neither an accident nor a material substance. It is not located in a place nor is it a thing bounded. It is not *joined* with the human body nor is it separate from it. It is not within the body nor without. It has a special connection with the physical heart of man and "most human minds have been puzzled as to the actual connection. Its connection resembles the connection of accidents with substances, or the connection of qualities with what they qualify, or the user of a tool with the tool, or the things located with their place."<sup>26</sup>

Al-Ghazālī does not wish to explain this connection further, mainly because it also is a matter which belongs to private "prophetic" knowledge (*mukāshafah*), which a person can understand only by himself. He was only able to write down that aspect of knowledge (*mu'āmalah*) which he believed necessary for the seeker to study and thereby guide himself that he might achieve for himself the incommunicable knowledge (*mukāshafah*) concerning such matters.

However, his definitions of four terms,<sup>27</sup> each of which indicates the reality of the spirit in one sense, suggest some clues as to the various activities and relationships of the spirit to its body. Each of these terms, besides being synonymous with the "spirit" or *laṭīfah*, emphasizes a special activity and connection of the *laṭīfah* to the body. They even indicate a reciprocity of interaction between the *laṭīfah* and the body. They also mean that the connection between the *laṭīfah* and the body does not occur at specific points but is a connection with the whole, although the *laṭīfah* has a "special" connection with the heart. The four terms are: (1) *qalb* (heart), (2) *rūḥ* (the spirit or soul), (3) *nafs* (the self), and (4) *aql* (the intellect or intelligence). Since each of these terms has had a long history of usage in Arabic and Muslim literature, the following remarks must be made before a presentation of Al-Ghazālī's definitions.

A thorough historical study of each of the above expressions and the predominant ideas each has persistently implied would throw a great deal of light on the movement of thought in Islam and would reveal how the basic contents of each and the relationships between

(26) *Ihyā'*; p. 1350.

(27) *Ibid*; pp. 1348-1352.

the concepts they have implied have mirrored as well as influenced the Muslim mind. Such a study *could* put in a truer perspective the modes by which intellectual interactions between Muslims and other civilizations took place, and by which Muslim thinkers understood and assimilated ideas from other cultures. In this case it could show the persisting influence of former Muslim generations on Al-Ghazālī himself and could set his contributions in a sharper focus.

In Arabic, the "heart" has always suggested the inmost, most secret and genuine thoughts, or in other words, the deepest basis of man's cognizant nature. The term "heart" prevails in the *Qur'ān* and Traditions to indicate the seat of knowledge. That *this* term rather than "mind" should be used to indicate knowledge reveals a basic characteristic of Muslim thought and its general outlook on knowledge and the real. While the emotional side of man is related to the heart, the heart is *not* the seat of these emotions. Emotions and desires connect the heart with the body and are "genuine" (*ṣādiqah*) when the heart accepts them; and are "false" (*kādhībah*) when the heart rejects them.

Thus, in Al-Ghazālī and for that matter in Muslim literature as a whole, the ignoble emotional nature of man is essentially alien to the heart itself. We shall see that this nature exists in order that the heart may attend to the needs of the body and try it as the "trustee" of the spirit. Thus:

The *qalb* (heart) "resides" in the physical heart and refers to the *laṭīfah* in man while it lives in its body. It is, therefore, the heart in man which is accountable to God, addressed, rebuked and punished. It is happy when near God and prospers when man has freed himself from aught but Him. It is disappointed, restless and miserable when man pollutes and corrupts it. It is what "in reality obeys God. What spreads to the other members of the body by way of acts of piety is from its illumination". When man is disobedient, it is actually the heart which "rebels against God, and what reaches the members by way of corrupt acts are its effects". Thus as the heart is dark or bright, vices or virtues appear, for a "vessel drips with what is in it."<sup>28</sup>

The *rūḥ* (spirit or soul) also indicates the above divine subtlety and, like the "heart", it too resides in the physical heart. The *rūḥ* is diffused into the body through "subtle vapor". Its effect in the body is like

(28) *Ibid*; p. 1348.



the effect of a candle in a room. Without leaving itself, its "light" spreads *life* into the whole body. In its essential side, the *rūḥ* is the *laṭīfah*, and therefore, is exclusively divine. As a perceiving subtlety, it is the highest faculty of knowledge responsible for those flashes of pure vision when man is completely released from any phenomenal consciousness.

The *nafs* (self) is etymologically connected with the root of "breathing" and is frequently and interchangeably used in Arabic literature to mean "soul", "life", or "appetite and worldly desires". The last meaning is the most predominant in the *sūfī* literature. Al-Ghazālī is concerned primarily with two of the many ideas which *nafs* indicates. One is the idea "which combines the forces of anger and lust in man." While these two forces are meant to serve a good purpose, yet they may be responsible for the evil tendencies in the personality and may actually extinguish the light of the heart. It is the evil or destructive side of anger or lust that should be disciplined and subdued under the absolute judgment of intelligence in the heart. The second meaning of *nafs* is the same as that of the "divine subtlety".

But the usage of *nafs* in this latter sense refers to the actual states of being or developments at a particular stage within the whole personality. Thus it refers to actual relationships between the heart and the appetites of the body and the particular condition of the "divine subtlety" under these conditions. There are three such different states, as derived from statements in the *Qur'ān*.

The first state is *al-nafs al-muṭma'innah* (the tranquil self) to which the *Qur'ān* refers in the following verse: "O thou tranquil self, return unto thy Lord, well pleased and accepted."<sup>29</sup> This is the highest state of the *nafs*, and takes place when the *nafs* has settled and has become completely undisturbed by contending lusts and therefore able to devote itself completely to the knowledge of God and the fulfilment of its "Trust". The second state is *al-nafs al-lawwāmah* (the upbraiding self). It is a state in which the self is still struggling with anger and lust and therefore has not yet achieved rest and complete devotion to knowledge. The *Qur'ān* refers to this self in "And nay ! I swear by the self that upbraids..."<sup>30</sup>

The third state is *al-nafs al-ammārah bi a'-sū'* (the self that commands evil). It is the state in which the self has finally abandoned struggle

(29) *Qur'ān*, 39 : 27.

(30) *Ibid*, 70 : 2.

with the enticements of lusts and yielded submissively to them. In this case, the individual becomes completely preoccupied with other ends than those of his "Trust"; his emotions and desires enslave his heart to their ends. His intelligence and thoughts are deeply colored by this enslavement. The *Qur'ān* refers to this state in "Verily the self indeed commands to evil."<sup>31</sup> These three different states of the self describe the three major types of human personalities.

The fourth and last term used in discussing man's nature is *'aql* (intelligence). This term too has many meanings, but only two are relevant to the analysis of Al-Ghazālī. First, *'aql* is that which perceives knowledge, namely that *laṭīfah* of which we spoke. But the term also indicates the body of knowledge actually possessed by the individual and, in this sense, it is an expression for the quality of knowledge whose seat is the heart, and the nature of which is greatly determined by the state of *nafs*. In this last sense the quality of knowledge is indicative of the actual plane of development in the individual, and thus mirrors the type of his personality.

Behind each of the above four terms lies a "physical" idea or a point of "connection". Behind the *qalb* there is the physical heart; behind the *rūḥ* there is the physical heart as the source from which issues "subtle vapor"; behind the *nafs* there is the body and its needs; and finally, behind the *'aql* there is the actual body of knowledge acquired by the individual. Thus while all these terms refer to that same knowing and perceiving "divine subtlety" and to which they all may apply in common, each has a distinct relationship with the body. But although we have indentified these relationships, the mystery of connection is still not solved, for the spirit is neither joined to nor separated from the body.

If we look more closely into the four terms, we find that there are degrees of connection, the most mysterious of which are those between the *laṭīfah* and the heart as an instrument of knowledge and between it and the "subtle vapor" as a source of life. The "heart" then is connected with the physical heart and, in addition, with the brain and the appetites and anger as well. This latter connection, however, is less mysterious, for we are now almost in the physical world of extension. The terms *nafs* (self) and *'aql* (intelligence) refer to total and actual states of being in human individuals. These states reflect the actual among the variety of possible developments within the original

(31) *Ibid*, 12 : 53.



constitution between the spirit and the body.

Because the term "heart" is more easily conceivable as the seat of knowledge in man than the spirit (*laṭīfah*), it is the word most frequently employed by Al-Ghazālī to indicate the "knower of God, that which draws near to God, which labors toward God, searches for God, and that which reveals what is with God."<sup>32</sup> Although these descriptions refer to the *laṭīfah* itself, and although it is this *laṭīfah* which actually rules and uses all the members of the body, it has a "special connection" with the heart. The *laṭīfah* has its seat in the physical heart but rules the self just as God has His "seat" ("throne") in heaven, while He is imminent in and rules the whole universe.

In brief, our capacity to know is in the spirit. The spirit has a special connection with the heart while it is in the body. Thus the capacity to know in the living individual may be said to be in the heart. The acquired knowledge and experiences of the heart form the 'aql (intelligence). The kind of intelligence is greatly influenced by the kind of relationships established between the heart and the appetites and anger. This intelligence plus these relationships reflect the actual state of the spirit in the body as well as its direction of development, which the term *nafs* expresses.

A discussion of what Al Ghazālī calls the "armies" of the heart, i.e., its equipment, throws still more light on the relationships between the spirit and the body. The word "armies" is chosen because the relationship of the heart to the various parts and attributes of the personality is primarily, or "naturally", a relationship of command and control. It is also used to indicate some similarity between man's sovereignty over his body and God's sovereignty over the universe. In the latter case, the *Qur'ān* states that God directs His universe through "hosts" whose nature or number no one knows save Himself.<sup>33</sup> Some of His "hosts" or "armies" are created in conflict with one another that some of His purposes may be fulfilled.<sup>34</sup> Man's relationship to his own "armies" has similar features; they are under his command, yet some of them are in conflict with one another. This conflict fulfils some of man's as well as some of God's purposes. In the former case, man experiences conflict and the development of the will and power to harmonize it for his ends, thus enriching his knowledge of himself. In

(32) *Ihyā'*; p. 1348.

(33) *Qur'ān*; 74 : 34.

(34) *Ibid*; 51 : 49.

the latter, conflict is the test by which God tries man.

Although this analogy between man and God hints at serious and important theories, particularly as to the nature of God's relationship to His universe, Al-Ghazālī does not carry it further for one main reason : the analogy cannot be reversed. Man cannot become the measure for God, though he has some characteristics and activities which may be suggestive clues to some of those of God. While these can only be clues, yet their existence reveals God's love and mercy to facilitate for man his journey in his quest for Him.

The discussion of man's "armies" is intended to show the suitability of man's seeking what is proper to him, as well as the initial discords within him, and the importance of the kinds of attitudes and habits he acquires to his quest for truth and self-fulfilment.

Two kinds of man's "armies" are discussed : first, those that are visible to our eyes, and second, those that only the "heart" can see. The latter will be postponed for a later treatment. Among the former are the hand, the foot, the eye—and all the organs of the body within and without. All these serve the "heart" at its command. "They have been created and fashioned to obey it and without any power to disobey it."<sup>35</sup> This kind is intended to nurture and protect the body. A healthy body is an essential vehicle for a healthy life of the spirit in this world. This health is preserved by bringing to the body that which it needs and warding off that which may hurt or destroy it. To this end the heart, while it lives with the body, needs to know the bodily appetites and be capable of anger. Appetite is essential to furnish what the body needs while anger is needed, first as a defense-mechanism to protect the body, and second, as a determined will, to procure what the body needs.

Appetite and anger, therefore, serve necessary ends. Both are essential to the survival of a healthy body. They are both good as long as this is their function, for a weak body would be a distraction in the heart's journey to acquire "experience and knowledge."

Yet it is appetite and anger which are in conflict with and could rebel against the other attributes of man (thus serving another purpose: the "trial" (*ibtilā'*) of the individual to fulfil his "Trust"). Unless both are cultivated and gradually disciplined to serve the former end only, the individual's development in experience and knowledge would not be in the

(35) *Ihyā'*; p. 1353.



right direction.<sup>36</sup> The rebellious tendencies of appetites and anger are at the root of all those acquired habits and goals which preoccupy the individual and consequently "veil" him from the knowledge of truth. Both are born with man; all other desires or base emotions and the habits and attitudes associated with them spring from appetite and anger. Entire Books in the *Ihyā'* are devoted to the many derived and acquired appetites and ambitions that are of consequence in the journey to God.

Whether the relationship actually established between the heart, on the one hand, and the appetites and angers and their derivatives, on the other hand, is good or bad depends on the degree to which the heart is free from the contending lusts and appetitive ambitions. Bad relationships where the heart is subordinated to the appetites are combined under the concept *hawā*, which is a frequent Quranic term. The closest English word for it is perhaps "self-impulse". We shall return to *hawā* a little later.

The needed appetites and the needed anger are therefore the "worldly" aspects of the heart while it is in this world, i.e., they are necessary to the heart that it may nurture its body and experience its relationships with the body. The body itself is fashioned in a manner whereby its organs are created to be obedient instruments serving appetite and anger.

Furthermore, the heart is in need of knowing the outside objects of appetites as well as the objects of danger and ambition. Thus it is in need of sight, hearing and other senses which are its connections with the outside physical world, and for which the body is provided with the organs of sense perception.

Thus, the relationships and connections between the heart and the body fall into three classes. One class is intended to excite and urge the body either to "obtain the useful and agreeable, such as appetite, or avert the harmful and disagreeable, such as anger".<sup>37</sup> This class is often called "will". Another class is that which moves the body and its members. This class is diffused in a fashion as to serve the former class

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(37) *Ihyā'*; p. 1354.

and fulfil its objectives. It is often called "power". And thirdly, a class which perceives and recognizes outside things, being located in the individual organs of sense. This last class is often called "sensory knowledge and perception".

The five senses are directly connected with five internal "senses" which are located in different areas of the brain. There is, for example, the image-making power of the brain which preserves the image after the outside object passes away. This is memory. Then man has the power to reflect on what he remembers, making new combinations. He can also recall what he has forgotten, then "gathers into a compound the ideas of the sensory impressions on his imagination through (an internal) 'common sense.' Thus within the brain there is this 'common sense' and there are the imaginative power and reflective power, and the recollective and memorizing power".<sup>38</sup> But the brain as a whole is by no means the seat of knowledge. It is just one channel which "connects" the heart with the world of extension.

The chief purpose in the above relationship between the body and the heart is the survival of a healthy body. Thus the animals have it as well. On this plane of life — the survival of the body — man can hardly be distinguished from animals except in that he has a finer constitution, for some of the above "armies", especially the senses and the brain serve higher ends than survival.<sup>39</sup> The animals, too, are endowed with appetite, anger and external and internal senses for the same objectives, and "common sense" is hardly a distinctively human trait.

Man as we observe him from the outside 'is a plant from the point of view of his nourishment and propagation; an animal from the point of view of his senses and movement by choice; and an engraved picture on a wall from the point of view of his existence in space.'<sup>40</sup>

The essence of man, however, is that in him which knows. Yet the fulfilment of this essence is not possible without a complete and rounded consideration of all that is in the human being. Man cannot achieve self-fulfilment by a single-sided development of what is most peculiar to him. Even if this were desirable, it would not be possible. For although finally his knowledge of his essential nature plays a more important role in his ultimate end, this knowledge itself presupposes the knowledge of every side in his nature. All these sides are keys to

(38) *Ibid.*; p. 1355.

(39) *Mishkāt*; p. 84.

(40) *Ihyā'*; p. 1359.



right direction.<sup>36</sup> The rebellious tendencies of appetites and anger are at the root of all those acquired habits and goals which preoccupy the individual and consequently "veil" him from the knowledge of truth. Both are born with man; all other desires or base emotions and the habits and attitudes associated with them spring from appetite and anger. Entire Books in the *Ihyā'* are devoted to the many derived and acquired appetites and ambitions that are of consequence in the journey to God.

Whether the relationship actually established between the heart, on the one hand, and the appetites and angers and their derivatives, on the other hand, is good or bad depends on the degree to which the heart is free from the contending lusts and appetitive ambitions. Bad relationships where the heart is subordinated to the appetites are combined under the concept *hawā*, which is a frequent Quranic term. The closest English word for it is perhaps "self-impulse". We shall return to *hawā* a little later.

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(38) *Ibid.*; p. 1355.

(39) *Mishkāt*; p. 84.

(40) *Ihyā'*; p. 1359.



his knowledge of the world and ultimately of God. Thus if the human individual is analyzed as a whole, we find that :

The true greatness of man lies in his capacity for eternal progress, otherwise in this temporal sphere he is the weakest of all things, being subject to hunger, thirst, heat, cold and sorrow. Those things he takes most delight in are often the most injurious to him, and those things which benefit him are not to be obtained without toil and trouble. As to his intellect, a slight disarrangement of matter in his brain is sufficient to destroy or madden him; as to his power, the sting of a wasp is sufficient to rob him of ease and sleep; as to his temper, he is upset by the loss of a *dirham* (sixpence); as to his beauty, he is little more than nauseous matter covered with a fair skin. Without frequent washing he becomes utterly repulsive and disgraceful.

In truth, man in this world is extremely weak and contemptible; it is only in the next that he will be of value, if by means of the 'alchemy of happiness' he rises from the rank of beasts to that of angels. Otherwise his condition will be worse than the brutes, which perish and turn to dust. It is necessary for him, at the same time that he is conscious of his superiority as 'the climax of created things, to learn to know also his helplessness, as that too is one of the keys to the knowledge of God.<sup>41</sup>

The helplessness of man manifests a divine wisdom. On the one hand it requires his intelligence to compensate for his weakness, thus engaging some of his "capacity for eternal progress". On the other hand, it makes him aware of his dependency on many things outside himself, thus compelling him to reflect with humility instead of arrogance,<sup>42</sup> and therefore leading him to self-commitment (*islām*) to a Creator. In this regard, there is no limit to scientific investigation in Islam. But it is *not* the cold detached kind of investigation. It is a very passionate investigation, which aims to see in every detail the works and glory of God. The results of the latter kind of investigation may be the same as those of the former, but with the important addition : a richer knowledge of God. There are other elements of wisdom to be found in the weakness of man and we shall return to this later.

(41) *Alchemy*, p. 29-30.

(42) Arrogance (*istikbār*) is, according to the *Qur'ān*, one of the main reasons for man's ingratitude (*kufṛ*) to God, and hence for disbelief in Him.

What differentiates man from the animal species is his capacity to know God. The capacity to know God, "is not confined only to those of the prophetic rank. Just as iron, by sufficient polishing, can be made into a mirror, so any mind by due discipline can be rendered receptive of such (prophetic) impressions."<sup>43</sup> The glory and dignity of man, by which he excels other kinds of creatures, "lies in his capacity to know God. This knowledge is his beauty, perfection and honor in this world, and his equipment and store in the world to come."<sup>44</sup> It is this capacity which entitles him to be the vice-regent of God on earth and to nearness from Him.<sup>45</sup> This capacity is a disposition within the nature of man's spirit which Al-Ghazālī calls "the religious impulse" (*al-bā'ith al-dīnī*) in contradistinction to the impulse of *hawā* (self-impulse).<sup>46</sup>

In its struggle to establish this "religious impulse" as master over the *hawā*, the inner nature of the heart, i.e. the *laṭīfah*, is aided by its capacity for knowledge as well as by its peculiar kind of will to act upon this knowledge. These two characteristics are its "armies" against the "armies" of *hawā*. The distinctive capacity for knowledge is the ability to comprehend "religious and worldly matters and make intellectual conceptions. These lie beyond the world of sensibles, and animals do not partake in them". As to this kind of 'will', it is what is active after a choice or decision has been taken. When a person "foresees by his intellect the possible consequences in a situation and (selects) the best of such possibilities, an urge for the best is aroused in himself. He then deals with the necessary means aided by the 'will' to achieve it."<sup>47</sup> This "will" is different in kind from that will associated with the urge to gratify appetites or base emotions, for the former may go against this lower kind of will which lacks any foresight and is heedless of consequences in seeking immediate satisfaction. The former will is peculiar to the heart, the latter is the will of appetite and anger. The difference in their natures is due to differences in the essential nature of the master each serves.

But these two "armies" of the heart, namely knowledge and will, distinguish man not only from animals but even from man as a child. As a child man is still "incomplete". His active characteristics at this stage

(43) *Alchemy*; pp. 24-25.

(44) *Iḥyā'*; p. 1348.

(45) *Ibid.*; p. 1357; *Qur'ān*, 33:72

(46) *Ibid.*; p. 2180.

(47) *Ibid.*; p. 1357.



are his bodily appetites and his anger which are necessary in order to develop a strong healthy body. He has to grow up to realize the peculiarly human knowledge and will and become gradually conscious of their role and importance in his war against the heedless appetites and anger (*hawā*).

He gains this consciousness in two steps. The first is the development of the capacities that were already with him. "His heart is born to embody all axiomatic and necessary principles ... The acquired (*nazariyah*) knowledge, however, has not yet taken place, but is only possible and accessible."<sup>48</sup> It is as though he knew the elements of writing but could not yet put words together which would convey any meaning. At about the age of puberty, when the body is almost complete, but when the "armies" for the religious impulse and self-discipline are still weak, God Who "has honored the children of Adam and has raised their rank above those of the animals, entrusts each person with two angels: one to guide him (in knowledge), and the other to give him power (will) (against excessive submission to lusts)."<sup>49</sup> The young person is receptive to the guidance and support of these two angels because his heart is essentially disposed "to the knowledge of God, and the knowledge of his own welfare among the variety of possible consequences in situations".

The second step is that acquired through constant experience and learning. As the human capacities begin to mature, the individual stores his knowledge and experiences and draws upon them when he wills. At this stage, he should cultivate certain habits which would enable his knowledge and will to counteract appetite and anger and to discipline them to the service of the heart. Normally a complete rule of the former over the latter should be achieved by the age of forty. The final victory of the "religious impulse" corresponds to "a state (within the whole personality) which is the fruit of experience and insight into the antagonistic and uncontrollable lusts and their natural opposition to the essentials of happiness in both this world and the next."<sup>50</sup> But in this stage of self-discipline there are all manner of degrees in which men differ in rank according to "how much they know, according to the significance or insignificance of their knowledge, and according to the

(48) *Ibid.*, p. 1358.

(49) *Ibid.*, p. 2180.

(50) *Ibid.*, p. 2181.

method by which they have acquired it."<sup>51</sup>

The ability of the "religious impulse" to resist the enticements of *hawā* is rooted in the innate "guiding light" (*nūr al-hidāyah*) of the heart. This light, however, is not sufficiently powerful unless it is reinforced by a trained ability to "endure" (*ṣabr*) the pains of neglected appetites or emotions. Endurance, like any other habit in self-discipline, is self-imposed and is at first difficult. However, the difficulty here is gradually overcome as the person develops at the same time a genuine feeling of "gratitude" (*shukr*) to God.

Gratitude itself, like all other aspects of belief, includes three constituents each of which is peculiar to *shukr*: (1) knowledge, (2) a state of being within the personality, and (3) action.<sup>52</sup> The knowledge in this case is the knowledge of all the "bounties" (*ni'am*) of God upon man. This starts with the knowledge of everything immediate and upon which man depends, and proceeds to the knowledge of everything that exists. A feeling of human helplessness and humility follows this knowledge as well as a feeling of deep joy, for man realizes that his existence and everything he has is impossible without these bounties. This knowledge and this feeling gradually produce a state of contentment and gratitude and a genuine love (no. 2 above) for that which God loves. Actions (no. 3) which proceed from such a state are the result of choosing that which God loves and maximizing it, and avoiding that which God does not love.

This means that the knowledge of what God loves is at the basis of strengthening the "religious impulse", for this knowledge develops the habit of enduring the pain of neglecting excessive appetites and emotions, and ultimately produces a state of gratitude to God. The knowledge of what God loves is acquired in two ways: one, through a knowledge of the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah* (Traditions); the other through the insight (*baṣīrah*) of the heart. The latter is "speculative consideration".

Speculation aims to understand "the wisdom of God the most High in His creation of everything that exists. For He did not create anything in the universe unless there is some wisdom in its existence."<sup>53</sup> Underneath this wisdom there is a purpose which that thing is intended

(51) *Ibid.*, p. 1359.

(52) Each of the aspects of *'imān* (belief) is discussed in a separate Book in the *Iḥyā'*, and each includes these three components.

(53) "Oh, our Lord, Thou hast not created all this in vain." *Ṣūrah* 3: 188.



to fulfil. This purpose itself is what God loves."<sup>54</sup> God's wisdom may be obvious, such as His wisdom in some functions of the sun, or may be mysterious (or hidden). The knowledge of both is essential to the journey of knowing God. Reference to those who do not reflect on God's wisdom and those who do is made in: "Shall then he who walks bent upon his face [i.e., who does not reflect on the wonders of what he could see] be better guided than he who walks upright upon the right path?"<sup>55</sup>

Thus belief, viewed from the point of view of knowledge and action, may be considered to be founded upon two pillars: "one, certain knowledge, and the other 'endurance' (*ṣabr*)."<sup>56</sup> But viewed from the plane of the state of being which the person achieves within himself, or in other words, the state produced within the personality as a result of the knowledge and habituation to support the "religious impulse", its pillars would be: certain knowledge and "gratitude" (*shukr*).<sup>56</sup>

Gratitude is obviously nobler than endurance. It is joyful instead of painful, and it is a positive attitude towards the quest for truth. Endurance fortifies the individual against undue devotion to appetite and anger. Gratitude leads the individual to God with humility and joy. And because the deeper the knowledge, the deeper the gratitude, the depth of gratitude is as fathomless as that of knowledge.

Al-Ghazālī compares the heart, as the seat of knowledge, with a dome which has many openings, a target subject to arrows from all directions, a mirror reflecting all that passes before it, or a pool receiving different waters from different directions. What it receives from the outside may later be revived either by stimulation of an outside object or an inside thought-impulse (*khāṭir*; *Einfälle*) originating in imagination, appetite, anger, or the complex qualities compounded from these. The thought associated with such impulses is what moves the operations of the will to act in specific directions. Overt action is the end result of a process which originates from impulses which are thought out, then willed or rejected. Therefore, a discussion of how particular impulses occur and the kind of thought associated with them reveals an important relationship between the heart and the body.

(54) *Ibid.*, p. 2225.

(55) *Qur'ān* 67: 22.

(56) *Ihyā'*; p. 2185-6.

These thought-impulses are divided into those whose consequences are good and those whose consequences are evil. The first kind are called *ilhām* and the second *wasu'ā*. We have already mentioned that *ilhām* is a very important source of truth. It "is the awakening of the human self by the Universal Self,"<sup>57</sup> and we have pointed out the difference between *ilhām* and revelation, the former being just an "exposure" of the human self to the secrets in the Universal Self, the latter a linguistic expression of what is in the Universal Self transmitted to the human through an angel messenger. We have also said that the degree of "exposure" in *ilhām* depends upon the degree of receptivity in the human self, which itself depends upon the state of harmony which has been achieved between the heart and the appetites and anger. In its most general meaning *ilhām* is fair thoughts which summon to the good, and its opposite, *wasu'ā*, is thoughts which summon to evil.

These two kinds of thought-impulses (*khawāṭir*) "are accidental and like every accident should have a cause."<sup>58</sup> Therefore, differences in actions (which originate in impulses) reflect differences in the causes of their impulses. In a room which becomes bright by the light of the fire in the center while its walls are darkened by the smoke of the same fire, there are two different causes for these different effects. The brightness and the darkness in the heart are similarly due to two different causes. "The (immediate) cause of the thought-impulse which summons to the good is called an 'angel', and the (immediate) cause of the thought-impulse which summons to evil is called a 'devil'."<sup>59</sup>

Notice that Al-Ghazālī identifies the thought-impulses with either an "angel" or a "devil", according to what the specific impulse summons. The following statements lead us to believe that his conception of "angels" and "devils" was actually the *active* thought-impulses which occur in the heart. These thought-impulses are expressed by different names, "for different ideas are in need of different names (to distinguish them)". Whether angels or devils are entities which have a separate existence outside the heart and consciously influence the latter's process of thought, or whether they are just names to differentiate the kinds of thoughts in the heart itself, is not clear in Al-Ghazālī. The following passage shows how scornfully he criticizes those who investigate whether "angels" and "devils" are creatures.

(57) *Al-Risālah al-Laduniyyah* p. 28.

(58) *Ihyā'*; p. 1391.

(59) *Ihyā'*; p. 1391.



Let alone he who is occupied to know the essence of Satan, and let him investigate whether Satan is a subtle corporeal thing or not, and if it is corporeal, examine how something which is matter can enter into the body of man. These problems do not belong to Practical Knowledge (*mu'āmalah*). The example of the one who is preoccupied with such problems is like the one into whose garments a snake has crept. Instead of immediately removing it and avoiding its danger, he preoccupies himself in examining its color, shape, length and thickness! This is ignorance itself. We know the danger of the thought-impulses which summon to evil, we know that it is such thoughts which cause evil, and we know that what entices to an evil which should be avoided is our enemy.<sup>60</sup>

What is important is for a person to distinguish between the impulses which inspire him to the good and those which entice him to evil. "But the knowledge of the essence of Satan, his attributes, and his reality and the reality of angels is a realm for men of knowledge who have fathomed the secrets of what belongs to incommunicable knowledge (*mukāshafah*)."

However, in his definitions of "angels" and "devils", Al-Ghazālī refers to them as "creatures". But two lines prior to these definitions, he identifies them with the "thought-impulses". Does this mean that he considered the "thought-impulses" themselves as "creatures", in which case the terms "angels" and "devils" would each indicate a kind of "thought-impulses"? Though the language of Al-Ghazālī is vague it is suggestive of this meaning.

Now a few definitions are necessary. The sensitivity (*lutf*) which prepares the heart to receive and accept *ilhām* is called *tawfīq* (right guidance), and that which prepares the heart to receive and accept *waswās* is called "enticement" (*ighwā*). The word *angel* refers to "a creature created by God the most High whose functions are: to spread the good, teach knowledge, illuminate truth, reveal the rewards of the good, and invite to good action". The word *devil* (satan) refers to a creature whose functions "are the opposite of the above, i.e., to show the rewards of what is (in itself) evil, invite to sin, and frighten him who is set for a good deed with the threat of poverty."

(60) *Ibid.*; p. 1396.

The real causes behind all good or bad thought-impulses are two conflicting forces inherent in the creation of the universe. All things are coupled in opposition except God Himself according to the *Qur'ān* where God says: "Of everything we have created a pair."<sup>61</sup>

The human heart is "by its original creation (in the body; *fiṭrah*) suitable to receive the impressions of an angel and those of a devil equally."<sup>62</sup> But as the individual grows up, a tendency to be more receptive to one kind of impression than the other develops. The direction of this tendency depends upon the general direction of the conflict between the *hawā*-impulse (yielding to appetite and anger) and the religious impulse. Appetite and anger are "the fertile pasture in which the devil prospers", and yielding to them unreservedly molds the acquired intelligence of the heart by the enticements of the devil. But if the individual strives to discipline his appetites and anger, his intelligence is molded by the fair and angelic thoughts. Complete freedom from the enticements of the devil is humanly impossible, for as long as the heart has to have appetites and anger, a love for a long life, and other such worldly desires, man will always be subject to the traps of the devil.

Thus "the heart is a battlefield of a perpetual conflict between the angelic forces and the satanic forces until either one of them finally dominates the heart as its permanent residence, and the other cannot enter it except in disguise."<sup>63</sup>

Now it is not possible to categorize clearly all thought-impulses into "angelic" and "demonic". We are certain that some thoughts absolutely summon to the good, while some others absolutely summon to evil. But there is a third kind which is not clear in its effects, and the consequences of such thoughts can hardly be predicted. It is this last realm which presents one of the most difficult problems to communicable knowledge (*mu'āmalah*). No specific standards can be put down to distinguish this kind of thought-impulse. In this realm it is the individual's duty to be forever careful of self-deceit and the subtle traps of *waswās*. Such traps may present themselves in the disguise of fair thoughts and good deeds, for "the devil does not openly invite people to evil, but presents evil in the form of the good."<sup>64</sup> He may address a learned man

(61) *Qur'ān* 51:49.

(62) *Iḥyā'*, p. 1392.

(63) *Ibid.*, p. 1393.

(64) *Ibid.*, p. 1396.



in the form of advice, telling him :

Do you not see that people are dead-like of ignorance, doomed by neglect (of their spiritual obligations), and are almost on the edge of Fire ? Do you not feel any mercy for human beings to deliver them from darkness through your advice and teaching ? God has gifted you with a keen heart, an eloquent tongue, and effective enunciation. How can you then deny these bounties of God (by keeping them idle), and expose yourself to His anger ? How can you remain silent and not radiate knowledge or not call mankind to the right path ?

The devil persistently inculcates these questions in the learned man's self and leads him on with all sorts of subtle tricks, until the learned man engages himself in teaching people. But then the devil invites the learned man to embellish his appearance before the people, select beautiful language, and accentuate his good qualities, telling him : 'If you do not do these things, the effectiveness of your words will fall short of reaching their hearts, and consequently they shall not discover the truth.' He will persist in inculcating these ideas in the learned man's self, while what he is actually doing at this stage is instilling in him the tarnish of hypocrisy, the desire to be acclaimed, the pleasure of prestige, and the lust for power by the number of followers and the possession of knowledge; (and at the same time) to view the ignorant populace with contempt. (In this manner) the devil slowly leads the poor man, through his "advice", to doom. The learned man lectures, supposing that his motive is good, while in reality it (has become) the desire for prestige and recognition. He is consequently doomed, though he may think that he has achieved a high rank in the sight of God."<sup>65</sup>

The above passage was translated as an illustration to show what Al-Ghazālī means by self-deceit and the subtle traps of the "devil". It shows how careful and honest self-examination must examine the deep motives underlying actions, and how, without such examination, a good deed may actually be rooted in evil motives or may generate evil attitudes.

Therefore, Al-Ghazālī makes such examination a *farḍ 'ayn*, i.e., an individual obligation the neglect of which is sinful. Moreover, the

(65) *Ibid.*; pp. 1396-1397.

careful and honest alertness of each individual to the deeper motivations of his behavior should be a constant struggle which should come to an end only in death, for appetites, lusts and ambitions which originate in anger, are a part of the flesh and blood of men, and the enticements of *waswās* to gratify them are normally and in most people stronger than the inspirations of *ilhām*. Because most actions fall under the third category, i.e., those actions whose consequences are obscure, it is an obligation for everyone to "examine every thought-impulse that calls for action."

Al-Ghazālī's interest in "the good believer" is not primarily an interest in the establishment of specific virtues. The totality of virtues which distinguish the good believer is a quality essential in the human personality to free the heart to devote itself to the pursuit of truth and be receptive to it. Evil traits are the most serious obstacles to such freedom, for they engage as well as gradually mold the intelligence of the heart. Freedom from them by the establishment of virtuous traits through moral self-discipline is a necessary means to disengage the heart from unnecessary occupations other than the pursuit of truth. The "good believer" is a means to self-fulfilment, and the most important quality of self-fulfilment is the attainment of truth and the knowledge of God. In respect to this ultimate end of man, morality is not an end but a means.

This subordination of morality to the pursuit of truth places the specific virtues in a relatively easily attainable rank in the overall hierarchy of human values. The individual who seeks whole-heartedly to know God through his quest for truth, acquires the moral virtues with far less effort than the individual who is preoccupied with the difficulty of establishing these virtues within himself. We shall return to this very important feature of Islam when we discuss the meaning of the unity of God.

In his spiritual struggle, the human individual has moments of negligence and others of keen alertness, and moments of indulgence and others of abstinence. All these different moments leave their respective impressions on the "deep secrets" of the heart, and these impressions are "concealed from the consciousness of intelligence."<sup>66</sup> After reaching the heart, these impressions are gradually distilled from their phenomenal aspects and pass through the mysterious degrees of connection between the body and the spirit so that when they arrive

(66) *Ibid.*, p. 2182.



at the depths of the heart they no longer belong to the phenomenal world but to the world of the spirit, and thus become concealed from the plane of consciousness.

This perpetual stimulus — which comes from the outside world and is molded by the existing habits and attitudes of the individual — influences the development of the individual's heart, just as the heart influences the kind and intensity of these receptive habits and attitudes. This dual process is one of the wonders of the interaction between the self (*nafs*) and the body. "The effects of every particular state which occurs in the heart spread to the members of the body which do not move except in accord with that state, and every movement which occurs in the members may leave an effect in the heart. The matter is one of circularity (*dawr*)."<sup>67</sup> This circularity can be illustrated by the process of learning to write. The hand and the mental picture of what should be written learn to gradually co-ordinate their activities in order to produce the desired result. An action which starts as a self-imposed effort (*takalluf*) ends, as a result of constant discipline, as a natural (*tab'*) act. This result of learning is due to the reciprocal influence between the ideas in the heart and the movements of the members of the body. Virtuous habits are established within the personality by a similar process of learning. The principles of virtuous behavior as ideas in the heart may become natural and unconscious habits of the whole personality after a self-imposed and long process of co-ordinating the ideas of the heart with the various bodily aspects of the personality. Within the variety of experiences in the process of co-ordination, the ideas which were initially vague and obscure in the heart gradually become more and more meaningful. And the individual who starts as an imitator of ideas he has heard or studied may, by self-discipline and experience, discover the truth or falsity of what he started to imitate. Obviously his ability to judge with certainty assumes a full development.

The influences of the movements of the body on the heart explains some of the mysteries of ritual worship (*'ibādāt*). Rituals are intended to move the members of the body in such a rhythmic and harmonious manner so as, first, to leave such fair influences on the heart, and second, to establish the right co-ordination between the ideas engaging the heart at the time of performance and the body. Through the frequency of worship, virtues become the natural habits of the individual's behavior. Although they may seem at first formal and the intellect cannot find

(67) *Ibid.*; p. 1452.

reasonable foundations to justify their necessity to the ultimate goal of man, rituals serve this important role in the development and refinement of one's whole personality. "The wisdom underlying the acts of worship and the activities of all the members of the body is to purify, enlighten, and make the heart clear for the lights of belief to occur in it."<sup>68</sup>

The formation of bad or good habits through the frequent performance of particular activities, however, may lead one to observe only the major precepts of moral behavior and to overlook the consequences of yielding to what may seem a trivial but unnecessary desire, or what may seem a trivial act if taken by itself and isolated from the whole life of the individual. The cumulative effects of such trivialities, if repeatedly practiced, may form undesirable habits and may encourage a compromising quality of intelligence which gradually becomes stronger and stronger so that it becomes increasingly difficult for the individual to break away from these habits and for his heart to break away from the corresponding kind of intelligence. This indifference to what is trivial may eventually lead to the complete enslavement of the heart by appetite and anger, for in the long run, submission to unnecessary desires grows, making submission to sinful desires easier and easier, as well as more and more acceptable to the individual, according to the kind of intelligence developed in him.

Al-Ghazālī discusses these problems in connection with the problem of whether human nature can be transformed in character (*khuluq*) and nature through education. There were those who denied the influence of education and claimed that the inner nature of man grows according to laws uncontrollable by will and not subject to influence by education. The doctrine of these thinkers was founded upon two arguments: one, an analogy between the physical form of man and his inner form, and two, personal experience. As to the former argument, their contention was that it was not possible for man to change his physical appearance by will, and similarly, it could not be possible for him to change his inner character. As to the latter argument, they claimed that if good character were the result of a process of transformations by free will aiming to eradicate appetites and emotions, their actual efforts and personal experiences proved the impossibility of achieving this end. According to this school, good or bad character are matters of Fate beyond the control of the human will.

Al-Ghazālī refutes this doctrine by two arguments. First, he

(68) *Ibid.*; p. 1370.



depends on the common-sense argument which asks what would be the use and value of knowledge, whether revealed or not, if the human individual cannot willingly and consciously transform himself to the better? The second argument is more complicated and more universal in its application. Briefly, it goes as follows:

All things are created either complete or incomplete in respect to the fulfilment of their respective functions in the life of the universe. The complete are such things as the heavens, the earth, and all the material bodies and their parts. Man in his free will has no means to transform the essential nature of such things. But things created incomplete are created to "accept" completeness when the proper conditions are present. In this sphere of existents, the free will of man can become a condition in completing such things, though the role of will in this regard is limited. Man, for example, cannot transform an apple seed into a date tree, nor can he exterminate the apple seed. So is the case with his appetites and anger.

On the one hand, appetite and anger do exist in man and, therefore, he cannot exterminate them. On the other, they are created incomplete, and hence "accept" a development which is peculiar to them and in accordance with the conditions surrounding this development. Man cannot change their basic nature, but he can influence their growth as an agent in the conditions of their development. It is thus because human appetites and anger have to accept completion that man, through constant struggle and self-discipline, can cultivate his appetites and anger to come under the absolute rule of his heart as one among the variety of developments that were possible for them. Free will as an agent in their development does not then aim at their eradication. It can only foster their growth and cultivate them gradually. The more active the role of free will and the more persistent this role in their growth, the easier and more effective it becomes in molding their future growth.

It is not only the sensuous pleasures which may lead man away from the pursuit of his "Trust". His essential nature itself, being of God's *Amr*, possesses the attribute of "lordship". This attribute, if left without the guidance of religious knowledge, delights in authority, superiority, distinction and exclusiveness in all things. It expresses itself in the individual's desire to be single in rule and safe from servility and humility. It also expresses itself in his love for all sciences, and in his claim for himself to science and knowledge and the comprehension

of the true nature of things, and in his jubilation when thought wise and his sorrow when thought ignorant.

Man's innate and therefore natural desire for "lordship" may combine with his appetites and anger to utilize his capacity for knowledge to their own ends. The distinguishing faculty of his intelligence (*tamyīz*) which appears early in his life lends itself to be used and developed in searching out all fashions and means to satisfy both his essential attribute of "lordship" and his appetites and anger. The "incomplete" but growing appetites and anger may thus be cultivated in accordance with his love for power establishing within his personality the wicked traits and attitudes and, without the guidance of religious principles, permitting them to grow stronger and stronger warping at the same time the development of man's discriminative power. Thus by the very attribute which offers to man a higher potential than the rest of creatures, man is capable of becoming peculiarly wicked and, in the attainment of his worldly ends, may exhibit the qualities of animals and the devil.

Viewed in terms of the dynamic forces which interact to make up his growing individuality, man is like both the animals and angels. The acquired intelligence of his capacity to know is determined by what relationships he develops between the dynamic forces within his personality. If he employs all his members and powers as an absolute sovereign and seeks their aid in the attainment of knowledge and well-executed behavior, then he has become like the angels. But if instead he turns to his love for "lordship" and to the body and its appetites, then his intelligence may be described as animal-like.

Under the skin of every individual, therefore, there are — in Al-Ghazālī's phraseology — the qualities of "a pig (appetite), a dog (anger), a devil (both), or a sage". The individual is similar to a "pig" when he is untrustworthy, extravagant, niggardly or hypocritical; similar to a "dog" when he is reckless, haughty, self-admiring and disdainful. He is capable of combining all the bad qualities of animals and becoming the "devil" himself. In such an extreme his qualities are deceit, stratagem, trickery, audacity and love for agitation and fraud. But the "sage" in man, disposed to knowledge and wisdom, may through religious guidance expose the wiles of the "devil" in him and keep the "pig" and the "dog" in subjection. The wrath of man is turned into gratitude (*shukr*). The establishment of a genuine feeling of humility, as a result of his knowledge of his dependency upon the bounties of God, and of joy, as a result of his knowledge of God's love, as well as his



freedom from that which is not lasting, enables the individual to turn his drive for "lordship" to fulfil its best purpose in the fulfilment of his "Trust". "Lordship" is turned to what entitles the individual to a true claim to precedence — i.e., to wisdom.

This kind of precedence is purified of any feeling of arrogance or superiority, for the individual is now keenly aware of the Majesty and Love of God on the one hand, and his helplessness as a human being on the other. He is also aware of the limitations of his powers as a "lord", and has already discovered the true meaning of his freedom in respect to his drives and motivations and the control of things outside himself and the importance of all these in the pursuit of his ultimate goal. "Lordship" thus becomes the mastery of one's whole personality and the concomitant mastery of relating oneself to things outside according to one's proper needs and according to what God loves — i.e., according to the wisdom intended in anything that exists. Under such a state of being, the "pig" in man turns to chastity, patience, temperance, gentleness and reverence, and the "dog" turns to courage, generosity, clemency and true dignity.

When this is accomplished, an organic equilibrium (*istidāl*) is established between the heart and everything else within the personality. The body comes under the absolute sovereignty of the heart and fulfils the ends for which it was created. The heart has learnt through its efforts to establish this sovereignty the nature of the body and the relations between it and the heart. These experiences become the sources for the heart to reflect upon and understand conflict and harmony between the visible and invisible worlds. The heart has also experienced some of the truths and wisdom in the ethical principles of religion, and through this knowledge has learned the virtues peculiar to its own essential nature. Now it is capable of a richer knowledge of its essence, and consequently of the invisible order to which it belongs. And having freed itself from unnecessary preoccupations with its body and desire for power, it devotes itself to the pursuit of the delights peculiar to its essence.

Equilibrium between the heart and the body is established by exercising the mean between two extremes which call for the satisfaction or the denial of appetites or anger or other drives.<sup>69</sup> The knowledge of

(69) The *Qur'ān* refers to the mean as a principle of ethical behavior in the following verses: "Who when they contribute are neither extravagant nor stingy, but between the two are right." (*Qur'ān*, 25 : 67); in "Neither keep thy hand chained to thy neck,

the exact mean, however, is humanly not possible. Neither does its determination for one situation necessarily apply in every similar situation over a period of a life-time. This is one reason why man cannot achieve perfection, for the heart in its growth is bound to err in determining the exact mean in every situation. Therefore, every individual still has within him a degree of imperfection when death overtakes him.

Good character as an approximation of the exact equilibrium between the heart and the body is either born as an act of God, as in the case of Jesus according to the *Qur'ān*, or acquired. The acquired virtues, like all habits, start by "forcing one's self to act according to the demands of the desired virtue."<sup>70</sup> Such an attitude to act in order to attain the desired virtues as the "second nature" should be perpetual throughout life. The end is that good action not only becomes natural but even pleasant.

The intensity and kinds of appetites and anger thus grow up according to the frequency of particular actions which aim to satisfy them, and the degree of guidance and control the will of the heart exercises in directing these actions. The heart is by its nature "disposed to wisdom, the love of God and His knowledge and worship". Its submission to "the demands of appetites is alien to its essence but acquired in its developed nature (*ṭab'*)."<sup>71</sup> Perversions in its acquired nature dispose it to what is not essentially its natural delight. Such perversions are similar to "gratifying hunger by mud instead of food". They reflect the acquired habits of "steady and constant action in one pattern of behavior". When certain desires and goals turn the heart away from seeking that in which it naturally delights, they are not natural and as a result the heart is sick.

Thus Al-Ghazālī defines character (*al-khuluq*) as "the firmly established constitution of the self (*nafs*), in which actions (peculiar to this state of personality) flow with ease and lack of effort."<sup>72</sup> If the state is such that beautiful actions are produced, then the character of

nor spread it wide open and so sit blamed and impoverished." (*Ibid.*, 17 : 29); and in "O children of Adam, take your adornments to every place of worship and eat and drink, but do not be extravagant, verily He loveth not the extravagant." (*Ibid.*, 7 : 29) Other verses pertain to anger and other derived emotions and desires which are associated with action.

(70) *Ihyā'*, p. 1449.

(71) *Ibid.*, p. 1451.

(72) *Ibid.*, p. 1440.



the person is beautiful. If bad actions are produced, then the character is ugly. Habitual actions mirror, in this sense, the beauty or ugliness of the inner state of a person's being.

But character is not mere action, for to take action as the sole basis of judging a person's specific virtues is erroneous. A person should not be judged generous if he gives once in his life or on very rare occasions; nor is he generous if his motive in giving is self-interest. On the other hand, the absence of action does not necessarily mean the absence of a virtue. Thus a person who is too poor to give may still be generous in character. Nor is character the sheer physical ability to act. Most people are capable of performing the humanly possible acts. But whether they do or not depends upon their deep-seated virtues or established habits. Nor is character identical with the knowledge of the beautiful and the ugly among actions. While knowledge *per se* is good and embraces both the knowledge of the beautiful and the ugly, action is good only when it is beautiful and evil when it is ugly. Al-Ghazālī does not, in this context, raise the problem that a person may know the beautiful but still act contrary to it. Such a case would not be conceivable under this theory of knowledge. Behavior is inseparable from the kind of knowledge in which it originates. True knowledge is inseparable from the value and importance of good behavior and good habits. When knowledge embraces the ugly while action may not, in a person of good character, "knowledge" describes the present *memory* of the ugly acquired in the process of establishing good character. A person of bad character has little or no claim to the knowledge of the beautiful.

The beauty of one's personality as a whole cannot merely be due to the beauty of one of its aspects or virtues. In the same way that the beauty of the body has to be a harmony between all its parts and the perfection of each, so is the case with the beauty of character. The forces (*quwā*) which interact to make up personality are : knowledge, anger, appetite and justice. Each of these forces has a virtue peculiar to itself. Hence, the four cardinal virtues of : wisdom, courage, moderation and justice. The discussion of these cardinal virtues, the virtuous traits derived from or associated with them, and the opposite vices, is reminiscent of Plato, though not quite the same. A comparative analysis of Plato's ideal of the "good man" and Al-Ghazālī's ideal of the "good believer" would reveal remarkable similarities as well as essential differences, the latter being due to the basic differences between Plato's and Al-Ghazālī's conceptions of God. These different conceptions imply

essential differences in general attitudes and orientations and the place and importance of the human being in the life of the universe as a whole. But this is a vast subject far beyond the scope of the present study.

In its constant changing from one condition to another according to its peculiar sensitivity to outside influences as well as inside impulses (*khawāṭir*), the heart's actual responses reflect its stability in good or evil or an oscillating state between the two. From this point of view there are three major kinds of established relationships between the heart and its body, corresponding to three major types of human personalities.

The first prevails when the heart is full of piety (*taqwā*), purified from evil thoughts and therefore free and wide open to thoughts from the Unseen. These good thoughts preoccupy it and create in it a constant desire to "know the subtle details of the good and discover the mysteries of its importance."<sup>73</sup> When the wisdom of God is revealed to it, it resolves that the good should be done and thus becomes excited to act accordingly. Such a heart has neither time nor sensitivity to the influences which summon to bad action, for it is now saturated with these good and saving qualities (*munajjiyāt*).

The second kind is the opposite extreme of absolute evil. In this case "the 'aql (intelligence) has been habituated to serve *hawā* and be pleased in such service."<sup>74</sup> This heart is saturated with appetitive impulses (*khawāṭir*) and images of objects and situations of pleasure, and thus only open to what excites or gratifies these. Persons of this type are the "negligent" (*ghāfilūn*). When advised they would answer : "I am anxious to 'convert' (follow the right path), but 'conversion' (*tawbah*) was not possible for me, and so I do not aspire for it any more." Or, he may not be anxious for 'conversion', and rationalize, 'God is forgiving, compassionate, and generous; there is no need for my 'conversion'. This poor person, his intelligence has become the slave of his passions, and he does not use it except to draw up these and similar subtle tricks to justify gratifying his passions."<sup>75</sup> The state of the *nafs* in this case is that which "commands to evil".

In their enslavement to *hawā*, hearts of this kind are different according to the different objects of their pleasure. One type may be indifferent to certain objects of pleasure and completely helpless before

(73) *Ihyā*, p. 1425.

(74) *Ibid.*; p. 1425.

(75) *Ibid.*; p. 2188.



others. Some are completely enraptured at the sight of a beautiful face, others are captivated by whatever gives social prestige, authority, or grandeur. Others still have "cast away all scruples of dignity and morality in accumulating money". A type which belongs to this category is the person who is hypersensitive to his personal defects. This person is deeply engrossed with his qualities that a trifle outrages him, and the least gesture pleases him. In a situation relevant to any of these types of persons, something like "black smoke rises and beclouds the heart, extinguishing its inner light."<sup>76</sup>

The third kind lies somewhere between the two. This heart is constantly oscillating between the good and the evil. In the following passage Al-Ghazālī gives a vivid description of the *jihād* (battle between good and evil) which takes place within this kind of a person.

When an impulse (*khāṭir*) of passion occurs, it drives the heart towards evil. This impulse is then followed by the light of faith which pulls the heart to the good. The *nafs* (appetitive self) awakes with its lust in support of the impulse of evil. Lust is now more lively and it beautifies the (anticipated) sensuality and pleasure. The *'aql* (intelligent self) is then awakened to support the impulse of the good by drowning away the images of lust, condemning its actions and attributing them to ignorance. It compares lust's assault on evil to a beast which is indifferent to remote consequences.

Now the *nafs* courts the *'aql* in the form of advice. The devil launches a steady attack on the *'aql*, reinforcing the urge for passion, and he asks (the *'aql*): 'What is this silly restraint? And why do you refrain from gratifying your desires and consequently harm your *nafs*? Do you see anybody among your peers who suppresses his passions and abandons his pleasures? Shall we leave for them the pleasures of this world to enjoy while you impose restraints upon yourself and remain frustrated, miserable and fatigued? They will laugh at you. Would you want this person or that to excel you in status because they do not abstain from that which you only just desired? Do you not see that sage So and So does not abstain from such passion? If such passions were evil, would he have not suppressed them?'

(76) *Ibid.*; p. 1425.

Now the heart is inclined to the side of the devil. An angel then launches his attack on the devil and asks: 'Were those who were doomed any other than those who followed their immediate pleasures and forgot their spiritual ends? Would you be content with a minute of pleasure as a substitute to eternal felicity? Would abstinence from the satisfaction of your passion be more painful than the pain of eternal misery? Would you be deceived by the example of others who overlook their ends and follow their desires, and support the devil? (You should remember that) no one among them can be responsible for the achievement of your eternal ends ... At this moment the heart becomes inclined towards the angel's side.'<sup>77</sup>

Such a person hesitates between the reasoning of these two "armies" until what is more predominant in respect to his heart at the moment overwhelms it, and he then decides. Every decision counts in the development of his future tendencies to decide one way or the other. Permanent inclination to one of these sides is very rare. Some persons are more frequently inclined to one against the other according to the qualities they have established and continue to reinforce.

These decisions constitute actions of obedience (*ṭā'āt*) or actions of disobedience (*ma'āṣī*) by human beings. Obedience and disobedience expressed in human actions and the effects of these actions manifest some of the mysteries of the workings of the Unseen in this world of phenomena by means of the human heart. For men of enlightened hearts (*baṣīrah*), the actions of individual persons are signs which reveal the inter-dependence between the surroundings, conditions and associations of the individual, and how this interaction is intended to either save the individual or doom him. This is one of the great mysteries of God's wisdom in the individual's Fate.

The freedom of the individual from the obscure and mysterious influences of his environment depends upon the kind of virtues he establishes within himself as determinants of his relatedness to the outside. Freedom in this sense is not freedom to choose and act in a specific instance. The latter, according to Al-Ghazālī, involves a highly metaphysical situation in which, besides the individual himself, the whole universe and the imminent interference of God are involved.<sup>78</sup> But freedom in

(77) *Ihyā'*, p. 1428-9.

(78) See his "Book on *Tawḥīd*", in the *Ihyā'*.



the former sense is a quality or state of being of the whole personality, achieved when, through knowledge and self-discipline, the individual's relatedness to the outside becomes one of insight into possibilities and limitations, and when he attains a knowledge of the importance of everything to his happiness.

If the problem of self-fulfilment is viewed as the process of pursuing knowledge, then this process involves three things: (1) the heart, (2) the object of knowledge, and (3) the reflection of the reality of this object in the heart. Thus the *Knower* is an expression for the heart which is the locus of knowledge, and in which the likeness of the reality of the perceived may be reflected. The *Known* is an expression for the reality of the perceived; and *Knowledge* is the likeness produced in the heart. Knowledge does not automatically result from the juxtaposition of the heart and the objects of knowledge, however. Al-Ghazālī sees five barriers which may prevent the heart from reflecting purely the objects of knowledge.

One is that the heart may lack the necessary equipment to reflect the likeness of things. It may still be "incomplete" as an instrument of knowledge, like that of the child. Second, the heart may have been soiled by excessive preoccupations with lust. Each sinful gratification leaves a stain which can never be removed. As the Prophet said: "Whoever commits a sin departs thereby from a piece of his intelligence which never returns to him." Subsequent good deeds remove the stains of sin, but even then, the heart would have been brighter without it. Another Tradition states that: "He who acts according to what he knows, is enabled by God to inherit a knowledge of what he previously did not know." The first-mentioned Tradition counsels that to avoid what is considered sinful protects the heart from being influenced in its making by the excessive experiences of passion. Such avoidance is especially useful in the case of those who are young, those who are beginners in the pursuit of knowledge, and those whose plane of understanding does not exceed the level of imitation. The benefits for such persons explain the wisdom as well as the necessity of the revealed principles of ethical behavior. Before a human being is capable of discovering the wisdom in the religious norms of conduct, he must have developed according to these norms themselves. Starting by imitating these norms and disciplining himself accordingly, he thereby fortifies his heart against acquiring those habits and attitudes which would prevent it from the pursuit of its proper ends. At the same time, he

establishes in it those virtues which assist in the fulfilment of these ends. According to the second-mentioned Tradition, on the other hand, the experience of acting according to revealed principles is itself a source of further knowledge and insight into these principles.

Because the freedom of the heart is the crowning point of a long process of careful fostering of the various aspects in one's personality towards self-integration, and because a pure reflection of the objects of knowledge presupposes such freedom, God as an act of mercy sent His prophets to instruct mankind in order to save them the risks of going astray and to point to them the path in the right direction.

But as far as the ultimate end of man is concerned, good deeds alone are not sufficient, for — and this is the third factor which prevents the heart from a pure reflection of the objects of knowledge — the heart may be relatively bright and free from blemishes but may be preoccupied and turned away from the direction which it should reflect. The heart in this case may be immersed in the details of bodily acts of worship or in the acquisition of the necessary means of living. Preoccupation with these activities alone can only reveal to it the subtle inadequacies in ritual performance and the deep defects of the *nafs* (the appetitive self) in the complete satisfaction of the heart. The individual would still be aware of some unfulfilled desires which arise in the heart and are peculiar to it. Without the satisfaction of these desires, the knowledge of the universal order under the Sovereignty of God (*ḥaḍrah rabūbiyyah*) and the divine realities remain mysteries beyond the heart's reach.

Fourth, the obedient heart which governs its appetites and is free to contemplate the Unseen realities, may still be unable to discover them for it may be veiled from them by certain inveterate prejudices of traditional faith which it has received in early youth. Such early prejudices which have been originally accepted by imitation on good faith may prevent the seeker from "opening" his heart to that which is different from the external form he has learned and believed.

This is a very thick veil, for by it most of the scholastic theologians and the zealots of particular schools of thought have been restrained, nay even most of the men of piety who contemplate the Divine Kingdom. These men are imprisoned behind traditional beliefs which have crystallized and become deep-rooted in their



hearts, so that they have become a thick veil between them and the perception of realities.<sup>79</sup>

The fifth and last barrier which prevents the "knower" from reflecting the likeness of the "known" is his ignorance of the means by which the desired knowledge should be sought. "The seeker of truth cannot acquire the knowledge of the unknown except by first learning those sciences which are pertinent to his objective." Through the proper understanding and arrangement of the principles of these sciences, the seeker finally discovers the right direction to his ultimate goal. All desired knowledge, except that which is inborn (*'ala al-fiṭrah*), "cannot be fished except by a net of what has already been learnt". This "net" constitutes the fundamentals (*'uṣūl*). Without these fundamentals and the talent of how to relate them and combine them to arrive at new knowledge, the seeker cannot proceed or know even in which direction to proceed.<sup>80</sup>

Free from these five hindrances, the heart is created to attain to the knowledge of things as they really are, "for it is a divine noble creature, distinguished from all other substances by this peculiarity and nobility". It is for this distinction that God selected the heart to bear His "Trust", which is "knowledge and the knowledge of God's Unity (*tawḥīd*)". Every human heart is "prepared to bear this Trust and is capable of it potentially". What disables it is one or more of the five reasons just discussed. Otherwise, God is known in the depths of Himself in the deep secrets of the heart. When the Prophet was asked: "Where is God? in the earth or the heavens?" he replied, "In the hearts of His believing creatures." Another Tradition represents God as saying, "My earth did not contain Me, nor My heaven, but the tender and tranquil heart of My believing creature contains Me." The Prophet was also asked: "Who is the best of men?" He replied, "Every believer of a tranquil heart", then he was asked, "What is a tranquil heart?" He said, "It is the pious and the pure, the heart which has been purified of ill-will, injustice, deceit, betrayal, envy and jealousy."

The knowledge of truth and piety are one and the same process, and neither is possible without the other. Moral virtues establish the individual in his mastery over himself, his relatedness to others and the

(79) *Ibid.*, p. 1368.

(80) *Idem.*

world, and enable him to release his heart to seek the higher realms of reality. The quest for truth has to be at the same time the cultivation of the knower's personality according to moral virtues.

The degrees of achievement in the knowledge of God's wisdom in things are indefinite, "for the objects of knowledge which God has created are infinite."<sup>81</sup> The highest rank is that of the prophet "to whom all or most realities have been revealed". A particular person knows his own degree and understands the stages which he has left behind. But the stages beyond have to remain, on the whole, matters of the unknown (*īmān bi al-ghayb*). Even in the "prophetic" stage of development, the degrees of achievement in knowledge have no bounds, and some matters shall forever remain matters of the unknown.

Then if the ultimate goal of man is the knowledge of God, no one can ever comprehend God as God understands Himself — not even Muḥammad. But if the pure yearn to meet God, He yearns more grievously still to meet them. If they advance a span, He advances a cubit. There is no niggardliness on His part. Nothing hinders men except the curtains of their hearts and the "veils" which the cares of the world draw.

In one short passage Al-Ghazālī puts down the individual's career and his ends in both this world and the world to come. This passage is a complete expression of his "world view", the hierarchy in man's ends, and the corresponding hierarchy in the knowledge and behavior pertinent to the achievement of these ends.

Happiness (*sa'ādah*) is the concomitant of mystical knowledge [*mukāshafah*], and mystical knowledge is subsequent to the knowledge of *mu'āmalah*, which is travelling on the path towards eternal felicity. Surmounting the obstacles in human qualities and travelling on the road of eradicating the undesirable among them, is founded upon the knowledge of these qualities. The knowledge of disciplining these qualities and the knowledge of acting accordingly assume the knowledge of the health of the body. The necessary conditions for good health as well as the survival of the body are facilitated by human aggregation, community feeling and cooperation, through which raiment, food and shelter are acquired and secured. These matters (pertaining to survival) are functions of government (*sultān*). The legislation of laws

(81) *Ibid.*, p. 1359.



which regulate justice among people as well as guide them in their conduct (*siyāṣah*) is vested in the jurist (the *faqīh*). The conditions for good health are the function of the physician.<sup>82</sup>

The reader should observe the relatively secondary position of human society, government, legislation and medicine. All these exist and are justified chiefly because the survival and good health of the body are essential to the individual's pursuit of happiness. Their importance is due to the importance of a healthy body to the life of the heart.

(82) *Iḥyā'*, p. 91.

#### CHAPTER IV

#### THE PRINCIPLE OF THE UNITY OF GOD

The writings of Al-Ghazālī are governed by two important considerations : first, the limitations inherent in the verbal transmission of truth; and second, the limitations in the understanding and "receptivity" of particular audiences depending on the stages of development they had achieved. These two considerations underlie Al-Ghazālī's theory of education, indeed his theory of knowledge in general, and have already been brought out in the second chapter where the problem of the embodiment of truth in the language of *Shar'* is discussed. Some of these important ideas are briefly recapitulated here to prepare for the discussion of the principle of the unity of God which follows. There Al-Ghazālī has given us a few examples of certain classes of existents whose reality cannot be disclosed in words and which cannot be grasped (or "seen") except at the *ṣūfī* level of understanding. Al-Ghazālī also tried to show that the terms used in the *Shar'* to indicate such classes of existents served as leads to orient the seeker in his quest for the reality of such existents.

Language originally existed to mark the objects of the conventional and ordinary experiences of man. The term "power", for example, is derived from the ordinary experience of power. It is applied to Divine "Power" in the *Shar'* not to identify the reality of this Power with the ordinary human experience of it, but to suggest some similarity. This similarity is remote and metaphorical, but nevertheless, it serves as a starting point in the direction of knowing Divine Power. Man cannot possibly seek to understand Divine Power without some clues which exist in his own experience of "power" and without the possibility that this experience may develop to the degree of true "insight" into Divine Power. Nor can man possibly conceive of any object whose reality lies entirely outside the possibilities of his experience and for which no clue (*dalīl*) already exists within his ordinary knowledge and experience.

The language of the *Shar'* bridges the gulf between the ordinary experience of man and reality so that, in the course of his quest for the knowledge of reality, man gains from it sufficient and reliable guidance



to orient himself in the right direction. His ability to "see" the truth embodied in the language of the *Shar'* is a development in his "insight" which begins with what this language indicates in his ordinary experiences. In this sense the language of the *Shar'* reflect man's journey towards truth. The linguistic surface can be readily understood by all persons capable of ordinary human experiences, but the hidden contents can be "seen" only by those capable of the highest experiences open to man. To the ordinary person, this language is only suggestive of what is reality, but to the person of "insight" it is the truth of reality. However, in various contexts Al-Ghazali suggests that language — including that of *Shar'* — and the corresponding degree of common experience and knowledge with which its terms are ordinarily associated, may itself become a serious obstacle to a pure "insight" into reality. The residue of concrete images and experiences contained in language usually persists with some persons beclouding their understanding of spiritual realities. Even when the seeker is aware of this danger, it is still difficult for him to suppress these images and experiences in his efforts to "see" spiritual realities purged from the original images of his ordinary experiences and contained in language. In either case, language becomes a "veil" to true "insight" (*baṣīrah*) or to a pure vision of reality. The knowledge of reality, though rooted in the ordinary experiences of man and stimulated by verbal discourse, is in the end a *private* attainment and an immediate *dhawq* (lit., taste), which the ordinary experiences and language may frustrate.

The last chapter established Al-Ghazālī's position that the search for truth must be a process of total self-development in which the acquisition of knowledge is directed by a self-discipline. The latent potentialities in human nature unfold and develop where an organic harmony between every faculty is established with the achievement of this harmony under the rule of the "heart", the "spirit" may disengage itself from preoccupation with the excessive demands of appetite and "anger" and experience that realm of existence to which its essential nature belongs. We have seen that this process of total self-development is, in one sense, a process of growth in experience, knowledge and habits of virtue and, in another sense, is a continuous "polishing" of the "insight" of the "heart".

We shall later see that some objects of knowledge are readily perceived in the early stages of man's development, while others presuppose higher degrees of knowledge and the corresponding

depth of experience. The nature of spiritual realities is such that their knowledge presupposes in the individual seeker a life of complete self-development. At this level the reality which underlies the phenomenal world and the "hidden" meanings in the language of *Shar'* are "seen".

Al-Ghazālī asserts then that the knowledge of reality, which in his system includes certainty in spiritual matters, is humanly attainable. But in order to attain it, the seeker of truth must establish within himself all the virtues of a perfect (complete) person, and in unison with his experiencing the establishment of these virtues in the development of himself, he must pass through all the degrees of knowledge acquired through the senses, the intellect and the spirit. "Insight" into spiritual matters is essential to the "insight" into reality.

The beginner, seeking to discover and know any spiritual matter, has no choice but to accept on faith the tradition of verbal discourse (*sam'*) transmitted to him by mankind, and to begin his journey from what this *sam'* suggests to him. His judgment of the truth or falsehood in *sam'* has to be suspended, for the beginner is not sufficiently developed to understand it with the depth of "insight", and he is, therefore, incapable of confirming or rejecting its claim to truth. While he is being guided by *sam'*, his objective as a seeker is to grow in order to understand it and discover for himself the reality of the things it suggests or mentions. His growth involves a constant questioning of what he learns, but throughout the beginning of his journey everything he learns or experiences is tentative knowledge and remains so until he finally attains the "insight" of the *ṣūfī*, i.e. knows reality through immediate experience (*dhawq*) because he knows himself at the level of self-fulfilment.

It is significant to note that in almost every context in which Al-Ghazālī discusses the nature of existence, he simultaneously discusses the mystery of knowing and the unity of knowledge and experience in a completely developed person. Reality unfolds itself in degrees to the individual seeker as he is developing his understanding of his own nature, and his own nature develops simultaneously towards self-fulfilment as he is accumulating knowledge and experience of existence. All three — the knowledge of existence, the mystery of knowing and self-discipline — are an undivided process within the individual seeker. In the previous chapter we have seen that the pursuit of knowledge and self-discipline are intimately related and develop in one process. Now another dimension is added, namely, the degree of the individual's understanding



of existence which parallels his stage of development in knowledge and self-discipline. All the three are interrelated in one process of personal development, and therefore, if possible, should be discussed and presented as a unified whole. Such a procedure, however, is neither linguistically possible nor is it even desirable. The treatment of the unity of the process of the three in guiding the beginner should include the "spiritual" objects of knowledge as well as the relationships between the various aspects of existence, which are also "spiritual" in Al-Ghazālī's terminology. These objects and relationships defy expression and therefore belong to the realm of incommunicable knowledge, i.e. to the realm of *mukāshafah*. But even if such unity lends itself to expression, it cannot be understood as a workable concept except by those who have already achieved the *ṣūfī* level of knowledge and experience, i.e. those who are able to "see" the "spiritual" matters involved because they have experienced them in their own person. The beginner, who has not yet experienced all the various aspects of his own nature and in whom these aspects are not yet related in a unified whole cannot acquire knowledge except in bits and divisions in accordance with his knowledge of himself, which is still neither complete nor related in a unified whole. A particular stage in his development reflects a corresponding degree in his "insight" to understand what and how much. His journey to truth has to begin with knowing and experiencing the multiplicity and diversity in the phenomenal aspects of existence; later he may begin to grasp the "spirituality" which underlies these aspects of truth and the unity which comprehends them. The simultaneous knowledge of all, however, may occur only at the level when one has experienced and known his own self as a whole, and the knowledge of the self as a whole may occur only when one has experienced and known existence as a whole.

Al-Ghazālī mentions two methods of arriving at the knowledge of truth. One of these "is so abstruse that it is not possible for ordinary intelligences (to understand)."<sup>1</sup> He usually mentions this method in discussing human nature as a fulfilled whole or in discussing the unity of existence. With the exception of the following statement, Al-Ghazālī refrains from suggesting in words the nature of this method. Actually, an elaboration of this method would amount to a statement of his entire philosophy in which substance and method can hardly be separated.

(1) *Alchemy*, p. 31.

The most explicit statement as to the nature of this method is the following :

Know that the best method to attain truth and achieve the love of God is to deduce (*istishhād*) from the knowledge of *Ḥaqq* (God) the rest of existence. But this is an abstruse method, and a discussion according to it is beyond the level of understanding of most people.<sup>2</sup>

The secret in this short passage lies in the term "*Ḥaqq*", which is one of the names of God, and which Al-Ghazālī advisedly uses in this context. We shall return to this term later.

The second method "is the easier and more accessible of the two, and most (of its substance) is not beyond ordinary understanding."<sup>3</sup> This method starts with the study of particulars which are readily "perceived" by ordinary understanding and which therefore may be communicated in language. The knowledge and experience of anything acquired through this method cannot be more than partial and tentative knowledge and can only *guide* man towards the final stage of his understanding reality and the unity of existence. All communicable knowledge (*mu'āmalah*) belongs to this second method. Language can describe the "scientific" aspects of reality but not that aspect which is the sphere of the spirit and whose knowledge is attained only by *dhawq* (immediate and private experience).

Al-Ghazālī does not pretend to "teach" truth. Teaching, in whatever form it occurs, is limited to the transmission of truth. Some fields lend themselves to teaching better than others, and some levels of understanding are more "receptive" than others. But even under ideal conditions for the transmission of knowledge, in which the subject matter lends itself to adequate expression and in which the listener (or the reader) is most "receptive", there are still areas of truth left which cannot possibly be transmitted, but without the knowledge of which nothing of what is "taught" can be adequately understood. Full understanding of anything must include the incommunicable "spiritual" aspect.

Al-Ghazālī knew that verbal communication of truth could not

(2) *Ihyā'*, p. 2619.

(3) *Ibid.*, p. 2621



exceed the level of communicable knowledge (*mu'āmalah*), for *mu'āmalah* contains only glimpses of the incommunicable (*mukāshafah*). It would be illuminating to study all of the instances in the writings of Al-Ghazālī in which the train of discussion comes to an end with the warning that, beyond a certain point, further knowledge cannot be communicated in words. At such a point, language reaches its limits as a tool for transmission and any attempt to pursue the substance of thought in words would be misleading and, therefore, particularly dangerous for the beginner.

Thus Al-Ghazālī never pretends to express truth in its totality, nor does he attempt (except in very rare cases and for the specific reasons discussed below) to put forward "proofs" for the existence of God. The knowledge of God, His attributes, and the "spiritual" aspect of existence, all presuppose an "insight" beyond the ken of the "intellectual" level of understanding and they all defy expression. The function of *mu'āmalah* as the road to arrive at a knowledge of these matters may be illustrated by the following example: "if a child asks us to explain to him the pleasure which exists in wielding sovereignty, we may say it is like the pleasure he feels in playing bat and ball, though in reality the two have nothing in common except that they both come under a kind of pleasure."<sup>4</sup>

This attitude in "teaching" is in the spirit of the *Qur'ān*. The *Qur'ān* does not "teach". It only reminds man to reflect on what it calls "signs" (*āyāt*) which are presented as clues to guide man in his pursuit of knowledge. Such "signs" are on almost every page of the *Qur'ān*. The following verse is suggestive of the *Qur'ān*'s spirit in this regard: "We will show them Our signs in the outside (*āfāq*) and in themselves, that the truth may be manifest to them." The word "may be" in the verse and the abundant usage of "*la'alla*" (perchance) in such contexts reflect a very important Qur'anic attitude towards learning. The existence of all the external conditions for the acquisition of knowledge does not necessarily mean that an individual will learn or arrive at truth. The actual knowledge that an individual may acquire depends also upon his "heart" as a "receiver".

In his writing, Al-Ghazālī is, therefore, as much concerned with the kinds of qualities and attitudes which the seeker must possess to cultivate his "insight" as he is with the external clues which may

(4) *Alchevy*, p. 38.

eventually disclose the reality of the objects of knowledge. In the place of *kalām*, he substitutes *mu'āmalah* as the method for seeking knowledge. *Mu'āmalah* guides the seeker in the direction of his ultimate goal by transmitting to him in verbal discourse whatever lends itself to empirical and "intellectual" expression; at the same time, *mu'āmalah* emphasizes the intimate and indissoluble interaction between the virtues and attitudes which the individual must establish within himself and his ability to understand the objects of knowledge and experience. It does not pretend, however, to express the unity of this process. It can only assert that the individual may become able to relate for himself all the various spheres of knowledge and experience by achieving within himself a state of being in which the various aspects of his whole personality have become united in a harmonized whole thereby freeing his spirit. A fulfilled personality is his only means of "seeing" for himself the unity which relates and comprehends the various degrees of his knowledge and of his experiences of existence.

These two considerations, i.e. the inherent limitations in verbal discourse which prevent it from transmitting the whole truth, and the necessary qualities which must exist in the individual seeker as a knower and a "receiver" of truth, are applicable to any object of knowledge, for the "spiritual" underlies every object of knowledge.

These considerations are brought out most clearly in Al-Ghazālī's discussions of matters of faith (*īmān*). Every aspect (*bāb*) of faith, in order to be known with certainty (*yaqīn*), presupposes three things in the knower. The three are indivisible; yet, for the purpose of *mu'āmalah*, they may be individualized. The three constituents of certainty are: *ilm*, the kind of knowledge peculiar to that aspect of faith; *hāl*, the state of being of the "heart", or the kind of qualities which the heart should possess as a "knower" of that aspect; and *amal*, the behavior which is concomitant with and reflects this knowledge and this state of being.

Thus, in order to be certain of the truth of *tawakkul* (trust in God), of *tawbah* (conversion), or of any other aspect which Al-Ghazālī classifies as an aspect of faith (*īmān*), the knower must possess the *ilm* (knowledge), the *hāl* (state of being), and the *amal* (behavior) peculiar to each of these aspects. These are the three indissoluble constituents of any aspect of faith.

*Ilm* by itself is not sufficient, nor is it even attainable without the other two. For *ilm*, although it can be transmitted by others, is inherently



defective, for it suffers from the inadequacies of language in transmitting the whole truth. Certainty in matters of faith is a private achievement, privately possessed, and acquired through 'ilm, personal experience and the behavior pertinent to these matters in a life of self-development. 'Ilm by itself guides man towards the goal. However, in order that what 'ilm attempts to transmit may be 'known', the seeker must discover and experience it for himself. This is possible through the kind of self-discipline discussed in the previous chapter.

Al-Ghazālī avoids, except in rare and special cases, the method of "arguments" to transmit a knowledge of God or of any spiritual reality. As a matter of fact, his major attack on the methods of the *mutakallimūn* (scholastic theologians) and the "philosophers" is that arguments are inherently sterile and incapable of such an objective. "Arguments" ignore the "receptivity" of the seeker and his ability to understand the reality of the things which language tries to describe. Philosophers and *mutakallimūn* organize their material according to the rules of the "intellect", and therefore from a structural aspect, they cannot fully represent reality. Yet, in Al-Ghazālī's system as a whole, arguments have an important educational value. They are both useful and dangerous: useful because they supply the seeker with some firm ground at the level of the intellect, yet dangerous in the sense that they pretend to be actual representations of truth. In the former case, the seeker possesses some guidance meaningful to his level of understanding and consequently may not yield to despair in his pursuit of truth; in the latter case, the philosopher may leave the seeker with a sense of satisfaction and attainment, and thus "veil" him from further understanding.

According to Al-Ghazālī's concept of *mu'āmalah*, the greatest contribution that writing or teaching can make in the transmission of truth is the communication of those aspects of reality which fall within the bounds of sense-perception and "intellectual" investigations, but with the admission and warning that such communication is only preparatory to a private attainment of truth. Matters which are beyond the bounds of sense-perception and the "intellect" are also beyond the realm of *mu'āmalah*, i.e. beyond writing and teaching. Their knowledge is a personal accomplishment which draws upon all the knowledge and experiences derived from *mu'āmalah*. *Mu'āmalah* in its entirety can only be suggestive of their nature in the same way that the phenomenal world is suggestive of the "spiritual" world. *Mu'āmalah* is necessary to guide the seeker and set the direction of his search, but the discovery of

truth is a private achievement. In matters which are purely "spiritual", arguments should be avoided, unless there is a sufficient justification for them. For example, in the case of the human spirit itself, "a philosophical knowledge of the spirit is not a necessary preliminary to walking in the path of religion, but comes rather as a result of self-discipline and perseverance in the path."<sup>5</sup>

However, we find certain books and essays in Al-Ghazālī's writings which claim to put forward "arguments" or "proofs" (*burhān*) for the existence of God and His unity and which expound God's attributes. We shall discuss, as an example, the grounds on which Al-Ghazālī justifies his own writing of the famous *Jerusalem Essay*<sup>6</sup> to illustrate a situation in which he presents "truth" in the traditional dogmatic manner.

The *Jerusalem Essay* is one of Al-Ghazālī's most elaborate attempts to put forth "proofs" of the existence of God and to discuss His attributes. The essay, as the title indicates, was written after his "conversion", when he was a wandering *ṣūfī* in Jerusalem. The "proofs" and "arguments" used in this *Essay* were well known to the theologians of his time and Al-Ghazālī followed the already well-established line of the orthodox *mutakallimūn*. The *mutakallimūn* would have considered this *Essay* a great achievement in articulating truth on the highest level. As a matter of fact, if we disregard the *Essay*'s relative ease and lucidity, which are general characteristics of Al-Ghazālī's style, there is hardly any difference in content between the *Essay* and the *Irshād* which had made al-Juwayni, Al-Ghazālī's teacher, a famous *mutakallim*. But while the *Irshād* was meant only for the reflective few, the *Jerusalem Essay* was meant only for the masses. This difference in interest and purpose is perhaps one of the most illuminating instances which enables us to appreciate Al-Ghazālī's contributions to Muslim thought.

It is significant to note that the *Jerusalem Essay* immediately follows Al-Ghazālī's most vigorous attack upon the traditional discipline of *kalām* and his views on the principles of interpreting the spiritual realities mentioned in the *Shar'*. Yet the *Essay* itself belongs in spirit, style and level of reasoning to *kalām*. Then, why did Al-Ghazālī adopt *kalām* as the method in this *Essay*, and why did he wish to present "proofs" for the existence of God? The answer to this question lies in the introductory remarks of the *Essay* itself.

(5) *Alchemy*, p. 21.

(6) This *Essay* is incorporated in the *Ihyā'*, pp. 180-202.



According to these remarks, the primary motive which prompted the writing of the *Jerusalem Essay* was fear of the damage that false *kalām* could do to the minds of those not trained to detect falsehoods in its subtleties and of those unable to dedicate their lives to the pursuit of truth. The existence of false *kalām* in a community of untrained believers makes a statement of true *kalām* necessary. If *kalām* did not exist and false arguments were not scattered in a community of untrained believers, attempts to "prove" the existence of God and expound His attributes through the method of *kalām* would be due only to ignorance of what is involved. Belief in God is born in every human being by *fiṭrah* (the nature implanted in his creation), and no one can escape the urge of *fiṭrah* to seek a knowledge of God or the curiosity to explain existence. Moreover, there is an abundance of "signs" in the *Qur'ān* which serve as foundations for belief. All these "signs" call for a reflection which can be readily understood by an ordinary man, and they are sufficient to lead him to belief in One Creator who presides over and controls the entire universe.

But *kalām* was, with the exception of the methods of the *ṣūfis* and the "philosophers", the prevailing method of the various theological — this includes the orthodox — schools of thought. The common people were not trained to discriminate between the false and the true among the intricacies and clever subtleties of its logic. Their beliefs were endangered by some persons who presented their false doctrines in the style of *kalām*. Thus from Al-Ghazālī's point of view, while *kalām* as a method was incapable of discovering or expressing truth, it was, nevertheless, capable of either disturbing the beliefs of the masses or of protecting them from such disturbances. It was precisely to protect the beliefs of the masses that the *Jerusalem Essay* was written. The masses had to be supplied with an authoritative instrument against which they could measure the truth or falsehood of the *kalām* that they hear. Such a document had to be presented in the same language and had to use the same terms as those employed by *kalām* itself.

The *Jerusalem Essay*, therefore, was written neither for the ardent seeker who desires to know spiritual realities nor as a true expression of these realities. The *Essay* was meant to be memorized by the populace who, through becoming familiar with the terminology and language of *kalām* in this manner, might be able to discern the true from the false in the doctrines of the *mutakallimūn*, by matching the latter against what they had learned from this *Essay*. The *Essay*'s claim to expressing

truth is that "... it contains some flashes of reasoning, brief and without any depth."<sup>7</sup> Actually, it does not pretend to be more than just one step higher than a simple unreasoned credo which Al-Ghazālī had already written for school children to memorize.

Al-Ghazālī was content that, as far as laymen were concerned, the quest for God was sufficiently guaranteed by the natural urge of *fiṭrah* in each and by the many and various clues (*shawāhid*) to be found in the *Qur'ān*. Linguistic "proofs" to find God and believe in Him were not only unnecessary but even dangerous in that they implied a claim to communicate the knowledge of God. The last introductory sentence of the *Essay* clearly reveals Al-Ghazālī's sorrow over the necessity of resorting to argument to "prove" the existence of God. After he states that there are sufficient "leads" (*dalīl*) in *fiṭrah* and the *Qur'ān* for ordinary understanding, he says: "But (we submit the following proofs) by way of partisanship for truth, as well as by way of following the example of men of profound learning."<sup>8</sup> His purpose in this *Essay* was merely to protect ordinary men from false reasoning.

The importance of this discussion is not to stress Al-Ghazālī's interest in protecting the beliefs of the masses, but rather to show that he viewed the art of "proofs" and "argumentation" in the sphere of spiritual realities merely as a means of protection and not as a pathway to true knowledge. This idea is strongly and definitely expressed in another context in the following passage:

The *mutakallim* is distinguished from the common man (in knowledge) only by the art of argumentation and by his ability to protect orthodoxy (against false *kalām*). But the knowledge of God the Exalted, His attributes, and His works and all the things we have pointed to under *mukāshafah* (mystical knowledge), is not attained by *kalām*. *Kalām* may even become a veil to this knowledge and an obstruction to its attainment.<sup>9</sup>

We have seen that the decisive turning point in Al-Ghazālī's intellectual and spiritual career was his discovery of the sterility inherent in the method of the scholastic theologians as an instrument for knowing

(7) *Ibid.*, p. 180.

(8) *Ibid.*, p. 183.

(9) *Ibid.*, p. 39. ✓



spiritual realities. One of his greatest contributions to Islam was this discovery. We have seen that Al-Ghazālī had no quarrel with logic as such. His quarrel was with the undue importance which theologians had attached to it by employing it as the tool to know God. Al-Ghazālī reduced the status of "proof" in spiritual matters from one which has been the highest among religious disciplines to that of a necessary evil for the protection of the beliefs of the masses.

By demolishing the claims of *kalām* and convincingly pointing out its limitations, Al-Ghazālī wanted not only to save orthodoxy from becoming caged in appellations and forms of "logical" expression, but also to release it from the threat of dogmatism connected with the belief that language and logic were capable of capturing all kinds of truth.

Before discussing the principle of the unity of God as the ultimate point in Al-Ghazālī's thought, it is worthwhile to recall the Qur'anic ideas which are suggestive of the nature of God.

The following are the Throne and the Light verses respectively.

Allah ! There is no God save Him, the Alive, the Eternal. Neither slumber nor sleep overtaketh Him. Unto Him belongeth whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth. Who is he that intercedeth with Him save by His leave ? He knoweth that which is in front of them and that which is behind them, while they encompass nothing of His knowledge save what He wills. His throne includeth the heavens and the earth, and He is never weary of preserving them. He is the Sublime, the Tremendous.<sup>10</sup>

The Light verse below suggests the imminence of God in His universe. This verse inspired Al-Ghazālī's famous essay, *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, in which he applies his theory of the degrees of knowledge — which in this context he calls "the degrees of light" and "the degrees of darkness" — as the method for interpreting this verse and the Darkness verse which follows it. We shall have occasion to return to *Mishkāt al-Anwār*.

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The similitude of His light is as a niche wherein is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is as it were a shining star. [This lamp is] kindled from a blessed tree, an olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose

(10) *Qur'ān* 2 : 255.

oil would almost glow forth [of itself] though no fire touched it. Light upon light, Allah guideth unto His light whom He will. And Allah speaketh to mankind in allegories, for Allah is Knower of all things.<sup>11</sup>

The most important assertion in the *Qur'ān* is the absolute Oneness of God. God governs all things, great and small. The universe is a single scheme, contrived by the knowledge and wisdom of One Author and Mover so that everything works together. Everything has its place and importance assigned to it by God. Nothing is created in vain, and therefore every single thing is sacred and manifests some divine wisdom. God watches over all and He is nearer to man than his jugular vein. He rewards each according to his part. He is not bound by man's ideas of justice and equity, though these ideas as He has revealed them to His prophets are a part of His scheme for the good of man. He is "compassionate and merciful", yet nothing can escape His justice. To love Him is to discover and know His will and to serve His will according to knowledge is to find happiness (*sa'ādah*). To disobey Him and rebel against His will is to remain ignorant and miserable. Though God's power is infinite and absolute, He will never violate anything in the scheme according to which the universe moves.

The unity of God was the most important principle in Islam before the writings of Al-Ghazālī. But Al-Ghazālī developed it into the comprehensive principle in which all spheres of knowledge and human experience are gradually transformed into one related whole. This is "seen" by the "seeker" at the end of his long truth-seeking journey. Such spheres of knowledge and experience as the "physical", the "metaphysical", the "scientific", the "sensible", the "emotional", the "intellectual", and "spiritual", the "ethical", the "political", the "social", the "legal", the "economic" ... all become related in a single comprehension, and from which each sphere is better understood.

After having discovered the sterility of *kalām* and the qualities which should exist in the individual in order to know spiritual matters, Al-Ghazālī concentrated his efforts on developing this comprehensive system. He made the divine attributes, especially the unity of God, the final end which should govern the entire process of travelling towards a complete fulfilment. The seeker who arrives will then "understand existence not from the standpoint of its multiplicity, but from the

(11) *Ibid.*, 2 : 35.



comprehensive standpoint of its unity" and therefore "would not see more than One real Actor (*fā'il*) in all existence."<sup>12</sup>

The unity of God, as the ultimate object of knowledge and experience, is not to be sought directly, but through what it implies in the nature of existence. Nor should the unity of God be sought through "intellectual" vigor alone, for understanding it presupposes a total self-development in the individual who, at the *sūfi* level of being, has "seen" the "spiritual" both within and outside himself and has established within himself this unity which mirrors the unity of God. In this way he has become a knower. The principle of unity serves as a goal, to point the direction in which the seeker must set himself, and as a hypothesis that all existence and whatever happens in it constitute a unified whole working in harmony under One God. It serves as a key, accepted initially on faith and tentatively on "intellectual" grounds, to orient the seeker in finding harmony and unity among the multiplicity of things and the diversity of his own experiences.

The most illuminating single passage of Al-Ghazālī's personal conception of God is found in "The Book of Passion and Love" in his *Ihyā'*.<sup>13</sup> There Al-Ghazālī states that "the most manifest and most distinct of all existents is God, the Exalted."<sup>14</sup> The following is a paraphrasing of the first part of this passage. (It should be noticed that Al-Ghazālī does not attempt to do more than *suggest* a method of arriving at a knowledge of God.)

The statement that God is "the most manifest and most distinct of all existents" should imply that among all the objects of knowledge, that of God should be the first to acquire and the easiest to understand. However, the case is to the contrary and therefore demands an explanation. The following illustration serves Al-Ghazālī's purpose.

When we observe a person writing, we immediately know that that person has life, power, will and the knowledge to write. None of these objects of knowledge can be an object of sense-perception. The only evidence we need to arrive at their knowledge is the person's movement in the act of writing. With this lead (*dalil*) alone, these attributes in the individual are more manifest to us than other qualities he possesses, including even such external qualities which are perceived directly

(12) *Ihyā'*, p. 2495.

(13) *Ibid.*, p. 2624, ff.

(14) *Ibid.*, p. 2624.

by our senses. We are incapable of knowing some of his external qualities with the observation of the movement alone, nor are we certain of others, such as his height or the different shades in the color of his skin. But his life, power, will, his ability to write, and his being human, are all manifest and distinct to us, though our sight cannot perceive more than his movement — which has no connection with any of these attributes.

Underlying this illustration is Al-Ghazālī's whole theory of knowledge. Three basic elements should be emphasized in this act of knowing: first, there is an outside object of knowledge, the person writing. Second, there is a perceiver; and third, the act of cognition is a process. It is this process which is of importance to us in the present context. This process is initiated — and in this case it cannot start in any other way — through sense-perception. Sight "connects" the perceiver with some aspect of the perceived object. But all that it can bring to the perceiver is a *dalil*, a suggestive lead or a clue, which in this case is sufficient basis for the perceiver to "know" the rest, but without which the rest cannot be known. The resulting knowledge of the attributes of the person observed is beyond the ken of the senses. It occurs totally within the perceiver. It is an act of self-knowledge extended to the object perceived. The perceiver knows through his own knowledge of himself that the movement brought in by sight cannot occur unless the object in which it occurs possesses life, power, will and knowledge.

This latter aspect in the process of knowing is "understanding". Understanding in this case is founded upon two constituents: *suggestive clues* brought in from the outside, and self-knowledge which "interprets" these clues.

Now a similar process occurs in the act of knowing God. The main difference, however, in the act of knowing the life, power, will and knowledge of the writer in the above illustration, and that of knowing the attributes of God, lies in the fact that the writer's attributes exist in an object which our senses can perceive and individualize. Writing, which is what we observe, is an effect which cannot exist except when a writer exists. But we can *see* the whole writer on the one hand, and on the other, his kind of movement cannot exist except in an object like ourselves, i.e. in an object which has to possess life, power and knowledge in order to write. In the case of God, all that our senses can bring to us is the "movement" or, according to this illustration, the



"writing". They can only bring in effects. They cannot bring in *what* is behind the movements (or effects) they observe. Now through a knowledge of ourselves we conclude that there should be a Being Who possesses the kind of attributes which would make what we observe possible — or, according to the language of the illustration<sup>1</sup> of the writer above, we conclude that there should be a "Writer" of the universe. We see the "Writer's" movements and consequently know His attributes and the fact that He exists. "Everything we observe or experience" suggests His existence and becomes an additional clue which leads us to more knowledge of His attributes. In fact :

... the first clue to His existence is ourselves, our bodies, our attributes, the changes in our states (or moods), the transformations in our hearts, and all the stages in all our movements and our moments of rest. The most distinct of things in our knowledge is ourselves, next are the objects of our five senses, and next are the objects of perception of our intellect and our 'insight' (*baṣīrah* : the inmost knowledge of the heart). Every one of these objects has one instrument of perception, a witness and a lead (*dalīl*) (to its existence).

The seeker has to know himself and the universe before he is able to know God, and the more he knows about the universe, the richer will be his knowledge of God. Yet it is not the knowledge of himself and the universe which is his ultimate goal, but the knowledge of God. Such a seeker, oriented by the principle of unity and aiming to know God through the knowledge of His works, cannot be satisfied with the knowledge of a particular aspect of the universe. His aim should be to understand it from every possible point of view and understand it as a whole as the creation of One Author — every particular perspective being only an additional suggestive clue (*dalīl*) to a more comprehensive knowledge of the whole. On his road to arrive at a knowledge of God, the seeker possesses a great variety of clues in himself and in the world outside him which suggest power, order, wisdom, ... and unity. He is at the same time the measure of these clues, and in order to become a reliable measure he should enlarge himself to the level of self-fulfilment. On this road he is guided by revealed knowledge and the knowledge and experiences of mankind. But to become certain that God exists, or to know Him before this journey is made is not possible (unless God so chooses). The full knowledge of God is the end of the journey and

not its starting point. Self-discipline and knowledge of himself and of the universe are his equipment to travel towards his ultimate goal.

In his *Ihyā'*, Al-Ghazālī discusses the principle of the unity of God in connection with *tawakkul* ("trust in God"). Actually the principle of unity underlies and guides his entire system. Metaphysically, it is the principle of unity which comprises the "visible" and "invisible" aspects of existence. Epistemologically, it is the principle which finally relates the various degrees and spheres of knowledge and experience in a single whole. Psychologically, it is the unity principle which directs the ordinary human emotional experiences towards their integrated and highest fulfilment. Thus, in his "Book of Love" in the *Ihyā'*, the common experiences of love are the rudimentary experiences, which if fully developed (and this is possible only in a fully-developed person) enable the seeker to understand the love of God. In the "Book of Conversion" (*Tawbah*), conversion occurs in the "heart" of a person who has achieved "unity" within himself and with the outside. Socially, the principle of unity is Al-Ghazālī's inspiration and guide to "see" the unity of mankind and the diversity which distinguishes their various ways of life. This theme is clearly brought out in the books of "Gratitude", and the "Blameworthiness of this World", and others. We shall discuss some aspects of this theme later. Politically, the principle of unity relates the intimate connection between activities which belong to life in this world (*dunyā*) and matters which belong to *dīn*, i.e. matters which belong to the inner development of the individual. This theme is clearly brought out in the "Book of Knowledge" (*ʿIlm*) and the "Book of the Blameworthiness of this World". In the former Book, all human activities are classified as "sciences" related in a comprehensive whole but belonging either to *dunyā* or to *dīn*. In brief, the principle of unity is the central principle underlying the entire system of Al-Ghazālī's thought.

The knowledge of the unity of God (*taḥḥīd*) is discussed, as stated above, in connection with *tawakkul* ("trust in God"). The following passage is, first, an example of Al-Ghazālī's method in discussing matters of faith (*īmān*), and second, a preparation for following discussions.

Know that *tawakkul* (trust in God) is one of the aspects of faith (*īmān*), and know that no aspect of faith can be attained without the knowledge (*ʿilm*), the state of being (*ḥāl*), and the conduct (*ʿamal*) [which are peculiar to it]. Similarly *tawakkul* cannot be attained except through a certain knowledge, which



is its foundation, (a kind of) behavior, which is the fruit of this knowledge, and a state of being, which is what is here meant by *tawakkul*.

Let us begin then by explaining what is meant by the knowledge in which *tawakkul* is rooted. The term 'knowledge' originally means 'belief' (*īmān*), for belief is etymologically the acceptance of something as true (*taṣḍīq*). Any such acceptance by the heart is 'knowledge'. But when such an acceptance is founded upon solid grounds it becomes certainty (*yaqīn*). 'Certainty', however, is a complex concept, and in this context we are only concerned with that side of it upon which *tawakkul* could be established. This [side] is *tawḥīd* (the knowledge of the unity of God), which is expressed in your statement: "There is no god except the One God and He has no partners". [*Tawḥīd* is also] belief in His Power, which is expressed in your statement: "He is the King of the universe (*lahu al-mulk*)"; and belief in His Generosity and Wisdom, which is indicated by your statement: "Gratitude is due only to Him." Then he who says: "There is no god except the One God, and He has no partners, the King of the universe, and gratitude is due only to Him, and He is capable of creating [and has Power over] anything", attains the faith upon which *tawakkul* is founded; I mean when the meaning for which this statement stands becomes an inseparable quality of his 'heart' and the one dominating it.

*Tawḥīd* is the basis of *tawakkul*. It demands a great deal of elaboration and its understanding belongs to *mukāshafah* (*ṣūfi* knowledge). However, some knowledge which belongs to *mukāshafah* influences behavior through its influence on the state of the heart, and *mu'āmalah* cannot be complete without it. We shall, therefore, expose [from *tawḥīd*] only that which is necessary to *mu'āmalah*, remembering that *tawḥīd* is the fathomless ocean which has no coast.<sup>15</sup>

Al-Ghazālī distinguishes between four degrees of "seeing" the unity of God. The first is when a person states in words, "There is no god except God", while he is actually either unaware of or indifferent to what his statement means, or he denies its truth in his heart. Legally in the eyes of the community, such a person is a "muslim", for law is

(15) *Ibid*, p. 2494

not competent to judge the covert behavior of anyone. In the eyes of God, his case is different, for God alone "sees" the private thoughts of an individual. The second degree is attained when a person "accepts the truth of this statement in a manner similar to that of the majority of Muslims. This is the degree attained by the masses (*āmmah*)."

The third degree is attained when the unity of God

... is illuminated (to the seeker) and its meaning disclosed to him through the light of *Ḥaqq*.<sup>16</sup> This is the level of the *muqarrabūn* (those who become nigh to God). On this level the seeker still sees the multiplicity of things, but he also sees that all multiplicity is produced by the One, the Omnipotent.<sup>17</sup>

The fourth degree is attained when the seeker

'sees' naught in existence except the One. This is the level of the *ṣidāiqūn* and the *ṣūfis* call it "'dissolution' in unity" (*al-fanā' fi al-tawḥīd*), for when a seeker sees naught in existence except the One, he does not see himself. And if he does not see himself because he is intensely possessed with Unity, he is unconscious of himself in his 'sight' of Unity; or in other words, he is unconscious of the 'sight' of himself and whatever is created.<sup>17</sup>

Al-Ghazālī rejects *fanā'* in the sense that the human self is 'annihilated' and is 'dissolved' in the Universal Self. God, though imminent in creation, is outside whatever is created and nothing becomes a part of Him. The self is an individual entity, and *fanā'* is an extreme ecstatic state of the heart in which the self becomes unaware of itself in that flash of light when it 'sees' naught but the One.

The above four degrees of understanding the unity of God correspond to four levels in self-development and, in another sense, to four types of believers. Though the person of the first type is not a believer at heart, others have to accept him as a believer, nevertheless. Human beings are not competent to pass judgment on the internal beliefs of others except according to the evidence derived from sense-perception — in this case hearing the individual declare in words the unity of God. A believer of the second type (which includes the majority of Muslims) accepts the Oneness of God

(16) *Infra*, p. 133 f., also p. 148 f.

(17) *Ihyā'*, p. 2494.



... in the sense that his heart understands the literal meaning of the statement (There is no god except One God), and is free from denying its truth, because it has determined to 'fasten' ('*aqada*) itself around this belief. This kind of belief is a 'knot' in the heart which makes it devoid of joy and spaciousness.

It is the third degree of understanding which is to our purpose in this discussion. The following passage is a very brief statement of the final result achieved on this level :

... (It is attained) when it is disclosed to you that there is no actor in existence except God, and that He alone, without any partner, fashions and creates everything which exists whether it be a creature, a provision for life, a gift, a deprivation, life, death, wealth, poverty, ... etc. — anything that has a name. If this is disclosed to you, then you will rely upon nothing other than God. He alone will be the source of your fear, hope and confidence, and the object of your trust.

God is the sole Actor (*fā'il*), and all else are instruments which possess no independence to move even one atom from the kingdoms of heaven and earth. When the doors of illumination are open to you, the above truth becomes clearer to you than anything you see with your own eyes.

Naturally, the question of how the multiplicity of things in the universe could be reconciled to the principle of unity is the first issue which Al-Ghazālī raises in regard to this level of understanding.

How is it conceivable that the seeker does not 'see' except One when he sees the heavens, the earth, and the rest of corporeal bodies which are many ? How can the many be one ?

You should first realize that the answer to this question is the final goal of knowledge. ... A thing may be 'many' from a particular perspective and from a particular respect, and it is 'one' from another perspective and another respect. Man, for example, is 'many' if you see [as entities] his spirit, his body, his limbs, his veins, his bones, his intestines, ... etc. But from another viewpoint and another respect, he is 'one' when we say : 'He is one human being'. In respect to human-beingness, he is one. How may a person look at another human being without the

multiplicity of the latter's intestines, veins, limbs, and the details of his spirit, body, and members being raised in his mind ? The difference between the two viewpoints is that from one, the viewer, while in the state of being intensely possessed and joyful of the other person, is overwhelmed by his 'oneness' and is not conscious of his parts, but only of himself as a whole. From the other point of view, the viewer is interested in the 'many' and, therefore, sees the divisions.

Similarly, all existence, including Creator and created, may be viewed from many different perspectives and viewpoints. According to one consideration existence is One.<sup>18</sup> According to other considerations, it is many. Some of the latter considerations contain more multiplicity than others. Again, the above example of seeing man may illustrate this point (the variety of viewpoints from which the whole may be viewed as many). Though this example is not quite adequate, it, nevertheless, makes us aware of how each of the various ways of considering the 'many' [in existence], eventually leads to the 'sight' of the Unity [of existence] ...

This illumination in which naught is seen except the One, the *Hıqq*, may at times endure and at others occur, which is the more frequent, in a flash similar to that of lightning.<sup>19</sup>

It is important to turn now to Al-Ghazālī's cosmology to tie it up with the rest of his thought.

The universe has an existence of its own "which is outside sense-perception and 'intelligence'. The senses and intelligence acquire an image of it, and this acquisition is called perception (*idrāk*)".<sup>20</sup> Any object of knowledge which falls within the ken of our senses or our intellect has passed through several stages of existence. The first of these stages is its appearance "on the spiritual plane" as an expression of God's will. Then it passes through "a spiritual current" to a lower plane, and "its form appears on the 'Preserved Tablet' (*al-Lawḥ al-Mahfūz*; sometimes translated as the 'Tablet of Destiny'); whence by the mediation of the forces called 'angels', it assumes 'actuality',

(18) These statements should not be taken to mean that Al-Ghazālī was a pantheist. Though existence is One, God in Al-Ghazālī's conception is other than 'the created'.

(19) *Iḥyā*, p. 2497.

(20) *Fayṣal*, p. 57.



[and can be perceived by the senses or the "intellect"]. Thus whatever appears on the earth in the form of plants, trees and animals etc., is an expression of the will and thought of God".<sup>21</sup> All that is or will be, and all that which happens in the universe, appears first in the Preserved Tablet. Al-Ghazālī compares this "Tablet" to an architect's blueprint of a house; the actual house being a "copy" of the idea in the blue print.

The stage of "actuality" (*ḥaqīqī*) of what is in the Preserved Tablet is from the standpoint of man, either "corporeal" (*jismānī*) and hence "visible" (*ẓāhir*) i.e. could be perceived by the senses, or "spiritual" (*rūḥānī*) and hence "invisible" and could be perceived either by the intellect or by the spirit. The former is the "world of observation" (*ʿālam al-mulk wa al-shahādah*), the latter is the "world of the mind and the spirit" (*ʿālam al-malakūt*). Expressed in different terms, this means that "whatever is actual is either spiritual or corporeal".<sup>22</sup> It is very important to notice here that Al-Ghazālī identifies the "spiritual" (*rūḥānī*) with the "invisible", i.e. with the world which cannot be perceived by the senses. The "visible" and the "invisible" are the two aspects of "actuality". Both have one and the same origin, and therefore bear an intimate resemblance and relationship to each other, though each has its distinctive features. All that which is not "visible" is "spiritual".

But viewed from the total reality of all "individual" existents, "actuality" ranges according to the degree of "visibility" and the degree of "spirituality" they contain. Some of the "visible" objects are more "material" than others, and some of the "spiritual" "are more spiritual than others. Accordingly, if all existents are arrayed according to the degree of "visibility" or "spirituality" they embody, then "actuality" is a calculus which ranges from that which is most material to that which is most spiritual. There is nothing, however, which is purely "material", for every observable object or action embodies an idea whose realm is the "invisible". The "spiritual" is immanent in all existents, though in varying degrees. Thus, every visible object expresses a "spiritual" aspect of "actuality". In this sense "the world of observation reflects an aspect of that of the spirit."<sup>22</sup> The unity which exists in the Preserved Tablet, as the product of One Will, is thus further manifested on the "actual" plane of existence in both its "visible" and

(21) *Alchemy*, pp. 34-35.

(22) *Iḥyāʾ*, p. 1381.

"invisible" aspects. This plane is the materialization of the Knowledge and Will on the Tablet.

The "world of observation" (the visible) is what is usually referred to as the 'heavens and earth'. This world though vast and extensive is nevertheless finite. It is governed by time and space, and quantity and quality. The "world of the mind and the spirit" (the invisible) is infinite from the standpoint of man, finite from that of God. These two aspects of "actuality" constitute one whole, namely, the Divine Kingdom, *al-ḥaḍrah al-rabūlīyyah*, under which all existents are united, for "there is nothing in existence except God and His works, and His works are His Kingdom and His individual creatures."<sup>23</sup> Thus, the concept of the *Preserved Tablet* indicates God's knowledge, will and creativity while that of the *Divine Kingdom* indicates His absolute rule over all that which is "actual". The unity of God means that He is the only creator and the absolute ruler of everything "actual", be it a thing or an action.

From this perspective, the perceiver "understands existence not from the standpoint of its multiplicity, but from that of its unity."<sup>23</sup> Such divisions as the "physical" and "non-physical", or the "natural" and "supernatural", do not exist except from a particular perspective. It may be well to point out here that the connotations which exist in the Western concept of "supernatural" have no room in this system. Actually the term "supernatural" does not exist in Muslim thought, for everything in existence and every action has to be in conformity with the entire life of the universe, and therefore reasonable and explainable by *Ḥaqq* according to the *Sunnah* (i.e. the scheme) which God has planned for the whole universe.

Now from the standpoint of a person in whom the spirit has been disengaged, the universe would seem: "as though (it) has four levels of existence; an existence in the Preserved Tablet (*al-Lawḥ al-Mahfūẓ*), which becomes the actual; the actual, which is first perceived at the level of its corporeal existence, and is in turn followed by its existence in the images it produces in *khayāl* (imagination); and ultimately followed by its intellectual and spiritual existence, i.e. the existence of the whole in the heart."<sup>24</sup> But in reality these levels are not separate divisions. They are one whole process seen through various faculties of perception

(23) *Ibid.*, p. 1370.

(24) *Ibid.*, p. 1380.



which are finally united in the heart. They would seem several from the point of view of the individual perceiver who is not able to "see" their unity, because he has not yet experienced it within his heart. At the level of complete self-development in his own personality, he would be able to see reality as one, while at the same time understanding the various forms of its expression. What is equally important is that he would be able to understand the importance of everything and every occurrence in the life of the whole of existence.

According to this conception of reality, everything and every happening is sacred, for it is the creation of God, and according to the *Qur'ān*, God does not create anything "in vain" or in sport. Everything and every act serves a purpose. Things and actions may be considered "good" or "evil" only from man's point of view as they influence his development. But from God's point of view they all serve specific purposes. Also, according to this conception there is no such division as "natural" and "supernatural". The "visible" and "invisible" are only two aspects of the same reality. In the same way that man has a visible form and an invisible form, so does each and every part of reality. The unity of both the visible and invisible aspects of reality means that every visible object and every observable activity have two aspects: one the visible *Zāhir* which is perceived by the senses, the other invisible (*bāṭin*) which is perceived by the "heart". A full comprehension of any object or any action, however, means understanding it and its importance in the context of the process of reality as a whole, which necessarily means in the life of eternity. Nothing can be what it is except at the instance it occurs. For to be what it is, the life of the whole universe should have been what it was. In this sense, the whole of existence is a necessary condition for any object or any event to exist. Thus:

Certain possibilities depend for their coming into being upon the prior existence of a sequence (*tartīb*) of certain others, in a similar way that the conditional depends upon its condition (*shart*) ... But only some of these conditions may be obvious to the eye, while the others are not "seen" except by the few who uncover reality by the light of truth.

Nothing which comes into being prior to others may be delayed to follow them, and nothing which follows others in existence may precede them, except by "right" (*ḥaqq*) and necessity. This is true of all the works of God. Everything occurs according to a necessary sequence and therefore occurs by "right". Nothing

can be conceived to come into being except in the manner and in the sequence in which it occurs, and nothing is late in becoming except to await its conditions...

Thus the (individual's) ability to know cannot precede (the individual's) germ of life because of the absence of the condition of life (to know). Nor can the will precede life because of the absence of the condition for the ability to know.<sup>25</sup> Everything exists according to the order of necessity and the "right" (to exist) in the proper sequence. Nothing is created as a matter of sport or chance, but according to God's wisdom and direction.<sup>26</sup>

The term "*ḥaqq*", translated in the above passage as "the right to exist" is a subtle but very important concept in Muslim thought. Metaphysically speaking, one of its meanings is that as long as all the conditions necessary for the becoming of something exist, then God does not prevent its coming into existence, though He may be able to do so. On the other hand, as long as something exists in the manner and under the conditions which make it then what it is, God will not transform its individuality in violence of the laws and regularity (*sunnat-Allāh*) which He has "planned" for existence. He "may not turn the pen in your hand into a serpent, nor turn a wild cat into a lion, even if He is able to do so."<sup>27</sup>

The importance of this principle to science is obvious. But it is equally important to ethics. For ethics can hardly be separated from metaphysics in Islam, except that in ethics human understanding is an important variable in the conditions and outcome of a particular situation, and the influence of the outcome on the development of the individual.

What seem to be immediate "causes" in the becoming of something are only what is "seen" from a narrow perspective. Actually the existence of something is the result of a complex chain of conditions that are ultimately related to the past life of the whole universe in both its visible and invisible aspects. According to Al-Ghazālī<sup>28</sup> there is no such thing as cause-and-effect, but only the necessary conditions in the becoming of something individual or some event as the whole universe

(25) In order to make this clear, the sequence is: the germ of life, life, the ability to know, and the will to act.

(26) *Iḥyā'*, p. 2512.

(27) *Ibid.*, p. 2520.

(28) See *Iḥyā'*, "The Book of *Tawḥīd* and *Tawakkul*", pp. 2496 ff.



is moving. Certain levels of understanding are able to see some conditions and others more. On the level of a *ṣūfī* plane of knowledge, the individual "sees" all (or most of) the conditions necessary to produce an object or an action. These conditions include the "spiritual" forces in the universe which, from his standpoint, are inseparable from the "visible" forces.

The above discussion may leave the impression that Al-Ghazālī's conception of reality is "deterministic" and that his ethics are "fatalistic". There is, however, another side to *Tauḥīd* as the principle which underlies the unity of existence, which is important to our purpose here and without which our discussion would be incomplete.

Thus far, we have been concerned primarily with man's knowledge and experience of the universe or "the works of God". But if the goal of man is the knowledge of God, would his knowledge of the universe automatically give him knowledge of God? If so, then the universe and God are one. But if the knowledge of the universe is only a means to the knowledge of God, then God as a being is not the universe. The universe is only the "writing" which may yield some knowledge of its Author. But unless man possesses something within his nature additional to his embodiment of what exists in the universe as the basis of what he may know, he must be satisfied that God is the universe, i.e., he must relinquish the idea that God is a being outside it. If God is a being outside it, then man, in order to know Him, must possess within his own nature clues which cannot be found in the universe itself, since man cannot know anything for which he does not possess some clue within his own nature. Man's journey to know God is, then, the complete unfolding of his own nature. But even before his comprehensive understanding of the universe, man must become aware of certain suggestive clues which should lead him to believe that there is a Being other than the universe. Without such clues this cumbersome and self-imposed discipline to control his pleasures and seek the knowledge of the universe, unless sought for its own sake, would be futile and even unnecessary.

Expressed in a different manner, this leads us to look into ourselves for an "outsider" to the "microcosm" which our nature contains. If such an "outsider" exists within us, what qualities does he possess, and what kind of relationship does he have to the remainder of us and to the outside?

In the early stages of our development, we are aware of certain qualities in us which, though diffused in the rest of us and hence blurred,

contain a degree of distinctness which leads us to sense the presence of an "outsider". We are aware at an early stage that there is something in us which tries to "rule" and direct our lives. We are also aware that the delights of this something can be distinguished, to a degree depending upon the stage of our development, from the delights of the other aspects in our personality. From such delights we become aware of some distinctive qualities which this "outsider" possesses, such as delight in knowledge, delight in lordship, in power over things and other persons, in revenge, in forgiveness and mercy, in hate, tenderness and love... etc., and a desire for immortality.

These qualities, however, are mingled and diffused with the qualities of our "microcosmic" nature, and the objects of their satisfaction in the early stages are almost the same objects which gratify the latter. They are not distinct in our knowledge and experience until we achieve self-fulfilment, at which level we would have experienced and known our "microcosmic" constitution and at the same time experienced and known the immanence as well as the distinctness of the qualities of the "outsider". Thus if we review the "biography" of one of these qualities, such as "love", at the level of self-fulfilment we find that our experience and understanding of it has been a process of unfolding similar in pattern and development to other qualities in ourselves, such as "knowledge". Our experience and knowledge of "love" follows the same pattern of development — from love of the most "visible" to that of the most "spiritual".

Now, when all these qualities reach their full "maturity", the "outsider" in us has discovered himself fully. This "outsider" is the same spirit to which we have been referring so far. But in this context, the spirit is considered from the standpoint of those qualities which differentiate it from anything else in the universe. Though there is a "spiritual" aspect to the universe and its existents, this aspect does not possess the qualities which the spirit of man possesses.

We have, before the discussion immediately above, tried to show the process by which man is able to know the universe and to demonstrate that the basis of this knowledge lies in his own nature. But now we have considered the spirit of man from the standpoint of the distinctive qualities it possesses. Our purpose here is to arrive at "some knowledge of God's essence and attributes from the contemplation of the soul's essence and attributes, and we come to understand God's method of working and government and delegation of power to angelic forces, etc.



by observing how each of us governs his own little kingdom."<sup>29</sup>

We have a glimpse of the meaning and stages of creation when we analyse the processes involved in executing a simple action, such as the writing down of a word. First the wish to write is conceived in the "heart". This is then "conveyed to the brain by the vital spirits". The "form of the word takes shape in the thought-chambers of the brain, thence it travels by the nerve-channels, and sets in motion the fingers, which in their turn set in motion the pen, and thus the (word) is traced on paper as it had been conceived in the writer's brain."<sup>30</sup>

Thus "not only are man's attributes a reflection of God's attributes, but the mode of existence of man's soul affords some insight into God's mode of existence", i.e. God's rule and government of the universe. It would be impossible for human beings to know God if they did not embody a "god" within themselves, for "No one can understand a king but a king; therefore God has made each of us a king in miniature, so to speak, over a kingdom which is an infinitely reduced copy of His own."<sup>31</sup>

Does this imply an "anthropomorphic" conception of God? Al-Ghazālī makes it clear again and again that man is incapable of understanding God as God understands himself, that "no one knows the real nature of God but God Himself". We have already referred to the "anthropomorphic" epithets used in *Sharʿ* to describe the attributes of God. There we have said that the *Sharʿ*, in order to reach the ordinary understanding of human beings, has to describe the attributes of God in ordinary words, such as "knowledge", "power", ... etc. which all human beings experience to some degree. Yet we have seen throughout this study that such a term as "knowledge", for example, does not carry the same meaning for an ordinary person as it does for the *ṣūfī* who has achieved self-fulfilment. In the *ṣūfī* it becomes a quality of his state of being where the object of knowledge is no longer "separated" from the "knower", even though they do not become the same thing. At the *ṣūfī* level, "knowledge" is still "anthropomorphic", for Al-Ghazālī insists that human understanding can never penetrate beyond the limits of human-beingness. But the meanings of these terms have already been purged of their vulgar connotations and their contents have been enriched by the experiences of the deepest recesses of the spirit. The

(29) *Alchemy*, p. 34.

(30) *Ibid.*, p. 34.

(31) *Ibid.*, p. 35.

*ṣūfī* now possesses truer clues within himself which bring him closer to a knowledge of the reality of God's attributes. Yet he will never know these attributes as they really are — except by an act of grace from God Himself. God may reveal Himself or an aspect of His real nature to an individual. The duration of such a revelation may range from a flash of light to a little more in time. It is not, however, achieved by human efforts, because human nature does not embody it.

In other words, God is not an idealized projection of human nature — the invention of human beings. It is, rather, that human nature is created in the "likeness" of God. This "likeness", if fulfilled, becomes the basis of human certainty in knowing God. God as an object of knowledge does not remain an object of "faith" — He is known with certainty.

Thus the human spirit, understood as a sensitivity, grows in actual development and level of understanding in accordance with the knowledge and experience of a particular level or phase of existence. Each stage is at the same time essential for the spirit to acquire a full knowledge of itself as it unfolds towards fulfilment. However, each stage has demands and needs peculiar to it. These demands may become so strong that they preoccupy it, thus obstructing a further unfolding of the spirit and perverting its natural growth towards fulfilment. Thus, although the demands and needs which exist at a particular stage in the person's development are essential to "know and experience" a phase of the outside as well as an aspect of the spirit, they also establish habits which may "veil" the spirit from further exploration into the unknown phases of the outside and itself.

An ideal development of the spirit in its life in the body would be a movement throughout the entire "calculus" of the works of God from their most "visible" manifestations to their most "invisible", until a knowledge of its whole nature has been experienced in this movement. The human "heart" — the connection between the inmost nature of the spirit and its body — should be continuously "polished" from the very things which have originally enabled it to acquire some knowledge and experience in order to, first, "reflect on what is willed in the Preserved Tablet",<sup>32</sup> and, second, know itself and its essential attributes in its relation to its "microcosm", as the method to know God.

If we recall at this point the principle of *tauḥīd* (the unity of God),

(32) *Alchemy*, p. 24.



we see what this principle, the ultimate object of knowledge, means in the life of the individual seeker. There is a unity within the entire cosmos under our Creator and Ruler. This unity is discovered only gradually in the parallel and interdependent process of unfolding the unity within the individual human nature under the spirit's knowledge and rule. This parallelism between God and His cosmos and the individual and his "cosmos" is not a subject of "logical" interpretation. None of the attributes of man is identical with any of the attributes of God in reality. Human attributes even, on the level of their highest development, are only clues to those of God. The individual seeker, through experiencing the full reality of his attributes, achieves the level of *human* certainty concerning the existence of God and His unity, though he never achieves the level of *full* understanding, except perhaps in a flash of light which originates from God Himself.

At this point we might recapitulate the points discussed above from a more comprehensive viewpoint. Al-Ghazālī's primary purpose was to study whether man was constituted in a way suitable to fulfil his "Trust", i.e. to "know and experience" the works of God and arrive at a knowledge of God Himself. Therefore, he studied man from a variety of vantage points with this end in view. One of his chief interests was to discover the object and purpose (willed by the Wisdom of God) in the existence of every "individual" member, every human need and quality in man, and to explore its function in the development of the whole personality. Another major interest was to examine how man was related to the outside and how he was able to know and experience it. Still another very important interest was to examine how the spirit of man was related to his body and how this relationship influenced its development.

It seems so mundane that we should actually see the outside and acquire through this act some knowledge of it. But is it really so ordinary that we see the outside, form images of it, retain them, and understand them from a variety of perspectives? How can the small openings of the senses take in the unbounded universe and how can the heart know that which is outside itself or retain the knowledge of that which has passed away?

On the one hand, "you cannot perceive except that which reaches you (from the outside)". Yet, the mystery is not in being aware of an "outside" but in recognizing and understanding what it is. The answer to this mystery reveals, for those who know, the miracles and wonders

in the common and ordinary experiences of man. It can only be an act of love and beneficence of divine wisdom that God has fashioned human beings in a manner which would enable them to "receive" the outside and understand it as though it were something intimately familiar. "If God did not make for everything in the universe a 'likeness' (*mithāl*) in (ourselves)",<sup>33</sup> and did not endow us with the necessary and adequate channels to open our "hearts" to the outside, it would be impossible for us to recognize or understand anything in it. "There is not a single mystery in the universe for which man does not possess within his own nature a key to know it."<sup>34</sup>

The powers of perception are instruments fashioned to connect man with the outside. When this connection takes place, a simultaneous discovery is made about both himself and the outside. In this act, whose poles are himself and the outside, he discovers something about his own self and something similar in nature about the outside. The outside does not present itself only as an object of knowledge but, in the same process, it acts as an "awakener" of some aspects of the instrument of knowledge itself — the "heart".

But if we approach the study of man from the viewpoint of the development of his powers of perception we find that they unfold and follow, in their order of appearance and maturity, a pattern which is roughly the reverse of that of the order of "actuality" which takes place in the order of creation discussed above. Thus the perceptive powers which appear and "mature" earlier than others are those which are connected with the "visible" aspects of the outside, while those connected with the "invisible" appear and mature later. Among the first group of perceptive powers, the earliest to "mature" are those connected with the most "visible" phases of existence, while among the latter group the last to "mature" is that which is connected with the most "invisible" phases of existence. The maturity of the latter group presupposes the maturity of the former; and within each group itself, the maturity of that power which is connected with the relatively less "visible" existents presupposes the maturity of those connected with the more "visible". Thus "touch" for example, whose object of perception is "solid", is the first power to appear and "mature", while the "*rūḥ*" (the spirit disengaged from the concerns of the body), whose object is purely spiritual, is the last.

(33) *Ibid.*, p. 1380.

(34) *Mi'rāj al-Sālikin wa Rawḍat al-Ṭālibin*, Cairo, 1343 A.H.



In brief, the process of "knowing and experiencing" the works of God begins with the most "visible" phases of existence and proceeds towards the less "visible". Stated in different terms, this means that man was fashioned this way in order that he might, in an ideal development, experience and know the entire range of existence, from its most "visible" to its most "invisible" manifestations.

The senses, as the "external armies",<sup>35</sup> each "receives" a particular sphere of the "visible" in existence, and being structurally connected with the image-making power, *khayāl*, pass on their information to this power. The images formed there pass on through the "internal armies" of the "heart" where, through their complex activity, the "heart", according to the level of its development, sees some of the "invisible" in what the senses have brought in. This latter activity is called the "intellect" (*aql*), and that which is "seen" in this manner and through the medium of the "visible" is the "intellectual" (*aqli*) aspect of "actuality".

However, we possess in our everyday feelings a variety of clues, "such as anger, pain, pleasure, or love, which are thought-concepts and cannot be cognized by the senses". These feelings and the manner in which we cognize them lead us to believe that there should be a medium other than that of the senses which connects us with reality. They also lead us to believe that there should be certain matters in "actuality" which are not manifested in objects in the "visible" world: things which are "unconfined by space and time, and outside the categories of quantity and quality; nor can the idea of shape, colour, or size attach to them."<sup>36</sup>

We have said that any knowledge which is not brought in by the senses belongs to the "spiritual" world. Yet things in this world do not all possess the same degree of "spirituality". Some are more closely connected with the "visible" world than others. Thus anger, which it should be recalled is the root of all human ambitions, belongs to the "spiritual" world. But it possesses a low degree of "spirituality", for it is associated with a particular bodily state and exists mainly for the protection of the body. Though we make divisions in the sources of knowledge, we should always keep in mind that reality is an indivisible whole which ranges from the most material to the most spiritual.

The other doorway which connects man with those realities which

(35) See Chapter III above.

(36) *Alchemy*, p. 33.

are not expressed in specific objects in the "visible" world and which, therefore, cannot be perceived through the gate of sense-perception, is the "insight" (*baṣīrah*) of the heart. This "insight", like everything else in the individual, follows in its growth the same pattern of development. In this case, the pattern of ideal development ranges from "insight" of the least "spiritual" to that of the most "spiritual". It includes, therefore, the knowledge of the "invisible" which underlies the "visible", as well as the "invisible" which has no expression in the "visible".

In brief, man possesses two doorways of contact with reality. One opens only at the "visible" aspect of it through the senses. The other opens at the two aspects: at the "visible" through the "intellectualization" of the products of the senses, and at the "invisible" through the direct "insight" of the heart. *Understanding* is the outcome of all these activities and develops as the whole personality develops towards unity.

The difference between the two sources of knowledge — knowledge through sense-perception and knowledge through the insight (*baṣīrah*) of the heart itself — is illustrated by Al-Ghazālī in the following metaphor.<sup>37</sup> Let us imagine a pond into which water flows in streams from the higher-lying ground. Let us also suppose that the bed of the pond is dug up until there rises into it from beneath water purer and more abundant than that which the streams afford. Then, if the streams are closed up, the water will still rise up in the pond and may even be more steady and more abundant. The pond is the heart; the water coming from the streams is knowledge which comes through sense-perception; and that which comes from beneath is the knowledge which the heart perceives directly. This suggests that the knowledge derived from the "insight" of the heart is the more true.

This source, however, is late and appears only after the "heart" has already been "polished" from the illusions and falsehoods brought in by the senses and developed by the "intellect". The dilemma of man is that such "polishing" is not possible without the knowledge and experiences derived from the senses and the "intellect". Assuming that the individual fortifies his pursuit of knowledge by self-discipline, three processes take place in the growth of his "heart" as an instrument of knowledge: first, the appearance of images of sense-perception; second, the "intellectualization" of these images; and third, the awakening of

(37) *Iḥyā'*, pp. 1379-1380.



the deeper recesses of his spirit. All are interrelated. Yet the "maturity" of the second presupposes that of the first, and that of the third presupposes the second. Although the third (the spirit) should purge the knowledge and experiences derived from the other two from falsehoods and illusions in order to arrive at a pure knowledge of reality, its ability to do so is rooted in the full development of the other two.

In the early stages of development, the "heart's" ability to see the invisible is derived chiefly from the activity of the intellect (which "sees" the invisible order underlying the visible world) and from its experiences in the body, such as anger, pain and love. All this knowledge and experience, however, is intimately connected with the "visible" world. In order for the "heart" to dwell on deeper recesses in itself which are not directly connected with the "visible" world, however, it should develop an ability to isolate itself, at least for a while, from the rush and influence of the "visible" world; i.e. it must shut off the senses, the sensual images retained in the "intellect", and the influences of the heart's connections with the body. In this attempt, the fewer the traces which remain from the outside, the more the "heart" is aware of its unique nature in contrast to what is similar in its nature to the outside. In the development of this awareness all the images the "heart" has retained from the "visible", all it has experienced in its engagements with the needs of its body, and all the habits, attitudes and goals the individual has developed in his relations with "this world", are obstacles which "veil" the "heart" from a pure insight into what is unique in its nature, i.e. its *rūh* (spirit). Al-Ghazālī again uses the metaphor of the pond to illustrate this idea.

... the heart may be represented as a well, and the five senses as five streams which are continually conveying water to it. In order to find out the real contents of the heart these streams must be stopped, for a time at any rate, and the refuse they have brought with them must be cleared out of the well. In other words, if we are to arrive at pure spiritual truth, we must put away, for the time, knowledge which has been acquired by external processes and which too often hardens into dogmatic prejudice.<sup>38</sup>

In other words, the knowledge of what is purely "spiritual" should be acquired by what is purely "spiritual" in man. In this realm man's

(38) *Alchemy*, p. 26.

progress is infinite and eternal. In this stage, man's effort to overcome the obstructions caused by the rush of the diversity and multiplicity of the "visible" sharpens his "insight" and prepares him for a more masterful plunging into the subtler aspects of his experiences.

This discussion shows that the so-called "empirical" knowledge is, on the one hand, an inescapable and a necessary stage in the individual's development and, on the other, only a preparatory stage to the more comprehensive and deeper experience of reality. This attitude towards the stages of human development attaches equal importance to all the regions of human experience as yielding necessary clues to the ultimate knowledge of reality. Reality unfolds to the individual seeker in unrelated bits and is gradually revealed to him as he acquires additional clues of understanding it within himself. His knowledge of anything, including that of himself, at any stage in his development, can only be tentative and, therefore, should be constantly "polished" until he has explored everything within his nature. A comprehensive knowledge and experience of himself becomes his basis for a comprehensive understanding of human nature, individual things, the universe, and what could be humanly known of God. At this level of understanding, anything (and everything) becomes sufficient evidence for the existence and unity of God, for "... every single atom in existence is "seen" as an embodiment of the wonderful miracles (*āyāt*) which reveal the perfect power of God the Exalted, His perfect wisdom, and His infinite majesty and greatness."<sup>39</sup>

It should be noted that this attitude towards everything which exists as a manifestation of God is not peculiar to Al-Ghazālī but is a common feature of Muslim thought. It has engendered a feeling of reverence for everything and every occurrence as a manifestation of divine wisdom. It has engendered a feeling of reverence for the "scientific" as a necessary stage to understand the "spiritual".

We should now reconsider the mystery of connection between the spirit and the human body from a fresh perspective. The questions as to how the "spirit" interacts with its "body", and whether the two do or do not possess anything in common, present difficulties which are similar to the mystery of the immanence of the "invisible" in, and its interaction with, the "visible" aspect of existence. In one sense, both the "invisible" and "visible" are of one origin and are representations

(39) *Ihyā'*, p. 2619.



of the same underlying reality, and in another, both represent the total calculus of actuality from that which is most material in it to that which is most spiritual.

But, in the case of man, the difficulty is further complicated by two essential considerations, first, that the spirit is a "knower", and second, that the connection and interaction between the two — the spirit and its body — can only be understood through a lifetime process of unfolding and development. The comparison, however, between the connection of the spirit and the body and the connection of the "invisible" and the "visible", though helpful to our understanding, is not merely a matter of convenience. Man was created to be a "cosmos" and a "god" in order to be able to know and understand the works of God, and God Himself.

The spirit as a "knower" is a capacity or a sensitive register which, as it unfolds with the whole of man, acquires "actual" contents and may finally be capable of knowing that which is unique to its nature after it has acquired a full knowledge of that which is common in its nature with the outside. This means that the ability of the spirit to register and understand throughout its "actual" development in its experiences with its own body and with the outside is exactly because the essential nature of the "body" and of the outside is similar to *an aspect* of the essential nature of the spirit itself.

At this point a few remarks on the freedom of man would be useful.

It will be recalled that Al-Ghazālī rejected the principle of "cause-and-effect". In its place he substituted the principle of the unity of God and the concept of "*Ḥaqq*". What would seem to some as the causes of certain effects are only conditions in an eternal unified process of becoming governed by the unity and nature of God. The principle of unity underlies causality, creativity and movement in the whole universe. God is the real cause, creator and mover of anything which comes into being. Nothing can exist at the time and in the manner it does without the entire life of the universe, which itself exists and moves according to the knowledge and will of God as these are expressed in the "Preserved Tablet". Understanding an "individual" thing means understanding all the conditions of its becoming, all its relations to the outside, and its importance in the movement of the whole creation.

Thus, from the standpoint of God, everything occurs and moves of necessity, in accordance with all the conditions for its becoming which

are all an expression of God's knowledge and will comprehended under the concept of the Divine Kingdom.

As far as man's freedom is concerned, the proper perspective of its reality should be that of God. From this perspective, the individual's total personality as it has developed, all the influences on its development, the kind of understanding and intelligence (if these imply the degree and kind of integration between the various aspects of the personality, the traits, the ideas and the goals peculiar to a stage in a certain development), the mood of the moment, the outside conditions... etc., all become conditions governing and determining the individual choices and behavior in a particular situation.

In all the variables and conditions which make up a situation in which a human being is involved, the degree of understanding is one of the most important conditions in the total situation. The feeling we experience in hesitating to choose from a number of conceivable possibilities in a particular situation is itself a quality of our understanding and is, therefore, a condition in the outcome. The real freedom of the individual lies in the suitability of his nature to develop his understanding. On the level of self-fulfilment he is able to act as a harmonious whole under the rule of his "heart"; he is able to understand the conditions outside, understand their significance to himself, and understand how his knowledge of them enables him to influence the outcome according to his wishes. As an actor in the situation, the individual is not ordinarily aware of his personality, intelligence, attitudes and goals as conditions in the outcome. But viewed from the outside, from the standpoint of God, what the individual does happens of necessity. Freedom is the ability to understand one's behavior from this standpoint and to influence the conditions to produce the desired outcome.

The individual is by necessity a part of the whole situation in which he exists, and only by his understanding of this whole, his understanding of his ends, his understanding of the importance of things outside in the pursuit of these ends, and his trust in the subtle touch of God, can he become the *master* determinant "condition" among the rest of the conditions that make up that situation, and hence be "free".

But freedom in this sense implies a kind of relatedness to things in the outside. This is discussed in the next chapter.

According to this discussion, obedience to anything besides God would be false and only a misconception and, in the same manner,



disobedience to God would be equally meaningless.<sup>40</sup> An individual may believe that in his choices and actions he is obeying something other than God; he may expect benefit or harm from something other than God; or he may explain events by referring them entirely to specific and immediate "causes".<sup>41</sup> Such attitudes are due only to the narrow scope of his understanding. He is not able to "see" all the conditions involved in a choice, action or expectation, neither is he able to see *all* the conditions which must exist to permit the becoming of an event. What seem to such an individual as "powers" and "causes" are in reality only some of the intermediary and necessary conditions in the becoming of something specific in the whole movement of existence. According to a comprehensive insight, however, the individual knows that in a specific instance no one thing or set of things can be isolated from the rest of existence as the "cause" which should be obeyed—that, in reality, he is obeying all the universe as it moves under the sovereignty of God by "*ḥaqq*". Everything is subject to God in this sense, but only some understand this principle and "see" its application while others do not.<sup>42</sup> Those who do are "Muslims" in the essential philosophical meaning of this term. They are individuals who have "seen" the dependency of everything upon everything else and ultimately upon God; they have "seen" that they are subject to the entire scheme of things; they have "seen" that their freedom is in their understanding and therefore they have "surrendered themselves" to the only real Power behind everything and every event.

Al-Ghazālī applies these principles to discuss the meaning of "freedom" in human actions.<sup>42</sup> He classifies human behavior into three main types: "man writes with his hand, man breathes with his lungs and throat, and he penetrates water if he stands on its surface". All three types "are essentially the same from the point of view of necessity". The first type — writing — Al-Ghazālī calls "free" action; the second — breathing — "an action of the will" (*irādī*); and the third, a "physical action".

Necessity is obvious in the last type in which man is merely a "physical" object. Breathing is similar in nature, for it is not an action of the lungs and throat as such, in the same way that being penetrated

(40) *Qur'ān*; 2 : 83; 13 : 15; 16 : 49 - 50; 22 : 18. Many other verses express the same idea.

(41) *Iḥyā'*, p. 2496 f.

(42) *Iḥyā'*, p. 2509 f.

by the body is not an act of the water itself.

But it is the "free" type of action, such as writing, speaking, etc., which is ambiguous from the standpoint of necessity. It is in reference to this type that it might be said: "If a man wills, he acts; if he does not will, he does not act, and sometimes he wills and sometimes he does not." What then is the truth in this statement?

The will itself is connected with knowledge which decides whether an act is desirable or not. Objects of desire are divided into those which the individual, without any reservation in his "heart", knows are desirable, and those concerning whose value he is not decided and is therefore reluctant. A person does not hesitate to avoid the strike of a sword, for he is certain that such avoidance is to his benefit. But in other situations the "heart" is not certain of the consequences. It has to consider and calculate whether a positive action or an aversion is better. If after such consideration "knowledge" results, the will is consequently aroused to act accordingly. At this stage the execution of the act is no different from that in which the "heart" was absolutely certain of what to will, such as in the case of avoiding the sword. Then the only difference between the two types of acts is in the process of arriving at a decision.

"Freedom of action" then is an expression for a particular kind of "will" which exists as a product of some knowledge in the "heart". Behind every action, except the physical, there should be a will. The variety of "wills", whether the one which results from consideration or any of the others, cannot exist except through the judgments of the "heart" or through the "heart's" automatic connections with the senses and the imagination (in the case of reflexive or automatic acts). Thus if a (normal) person considered cutting off his own neck, such an act would not be possible, not because his hand would not possess the power or because of the lack of a knife, but because the will to do so would not exist, and it would not exist because the "heart" does not possess the kind of decision which is a necessary condition for its existence.

Accordingly, freedom in actions which are neither physical nor automatic should be in the decision-making process in the "heart". The issue then amounts to whether the "heart" decides "freely" or not. The answer to this question takes into consideration all that is in the outside situation, the particular individual making the decision, the degree of his insight into the conditions of the situation, the level and kind of his development — which takes into consideration his entire



personality as it has been discussed in the previous chapter — and the ability to perform those acts which are necessary to bring about the desired end.

Taking these matters into consideration, Al-Ghazālī concludes that man's actions are at the same time determined and "free": determined from the outside point of view, that man at the moment is just "a place and a channel for all these conditions", and free in the sense that "man is the place where a (kind of) 'will' comes into existence inside him — by necessity."<sup>43</sup>

The following passage will give some idea of Al-Ghazālī's theory of *tartīb* (sequence) which he substituted for the principle of cause-and-effect:

Some of God's actions succeed certain others in accordance with the *sunnah* of God [his scheme of things] "... and thou wilt never find any change in the *sunnah* of Allah."<sup>44</sup> God does not create the movement of the hand in orderly writing unless He has created in the hand a quality called "ability", and unless He has created life in the hand, and unless He has created a decided will [to write]. A decided will is not created unless a desire and an inclination for something is created in the heart. But such an inclination cannot be fully aroused unless God has created a knowledge that this inclination is agreeable to the heart, either immediately or in a long-term end. And God does not create [a specific] knowledge except after such qualities as the ability to move, to will and to know have been created.

Knowledge and inclination are always succeeded by a decided will, and will and power are always succeeded by movement. This is the process in every act. All of these are created by God. But some actions are conditions for the existence of others. Therefore, some should precede and others succeed. Will cannot exist except after knowledge, knowledge cannot exist except after life, and life cannot exist except after a body. Thus the creation of the body is a condition for the creation of knowledge, for knowledge is generated through life, and the place of knowledge cannot be prepared to receive knowledge unless it is living. The creation of knowledge is a condition for the creation of the

(43) *Ibid.*, p. 2511.

(44) *Qur'ān*, 33 : 62.

will, for knowledge generates will, and hence will presupposes a living knowing body. Nothing comes into being except what is possible, and possibility is governed by God's *sunnah* [scheme of things] which admits no irregularity, for changing it would be impossible. Thus whenever the conditions for the becoming of a certain attribute [such as life, knowledge, will, etc.] all exist, the place for that attribute is "prepared" to receive it. An attribute then becomes actual as a result of the divine generosity and the eternal law of preparedness to receive it. Thus, due to this law of receptivity, and due to the fact that the conditions for its existence are governed by God's scheme of the universe (*sunnah*), then all that happens, happens in accordance with the *sunnah*. [From such a viewpoint] the human creature (*abd*) is the channel for events to exist. All events in existence are contrived in God's knowledge and will (*Qadā' Allah*) in a flash of the eye in a complete *sunnah* which never changes. The becoming of any event is governed by limitations which it cannot violate. This law is expressed in God's saying: "Everything have We created with a measure (*qadar*)."<sup>45</sup> The perfection and eternity of God's knowledge and will (*qadā'*) is expressed in: "And Our creation (*amrunā*) is but one, like a flash of the eye."<sup>46</sup> Human creatures act of necessity within the avenues of *qadā'* and *qadar*.<sup>47</sup>

According to his comprehensive theory of human freedom in action, Al-Ghazālī finds room for all the various and seemingly opposing doctrine of the schools of thought which existed in his time. Each school of thought is "partially right in its doctrine, but not completely right." Thus the *Jabrites*<sup>48</sup> were right from the standpoint of the eternal laws (*sunnah*) which govern the entire movement of the universe. The doctrine of *ikhtirā'*<sup>49</sup> is right from the standpoint of change in the phenomenal world. And the doctrine of *kasb*<sup>50</sup> is right from the standpoint that (human)

(45) *Qur'ān* : 54, 49.

(46) *Ibid.*, 54, 50.

(47) *Ihyā'*, pp. 2084-5.

(48) *Jabriya* is the name of a school of thought which denies the freedom of the will. According to this doctrine, man, like any other object in existence, is subordinate to the compulsion (*jabr*) of God.

(49) *Ikhtirā'* is in a sense the opposite of *Jabr*. According to this doctrine man may spontaneously "create" his actions.

(50) *Kasb* (or *iktisāb*) is the doctrine which states that the action of a human being is created, originated and produced by God, but it is "acquired" by the human being; literally, *kasb* means "acquisition".



actions may either be against or in conformity with norms of formal religion. Al-Ghazālī compares the narrow scope of each of these schools of thought to the individual impressions of a group of blind men who, according to the famous Buddhist legend, were asked to describe an elephant. Each man thought that the elephant was only that part which he had felt with his hands and none of them could conceive of the elephant as a whole.

In brief, the answer to the question of human freedom of action depends upon the standpoint from which it is asked. From the standpoint of God, where the entire life of the universe in its eternal and detailed movement is taken into consideration, man is not free. From the standpoint of ordinary human intelligence, where only some of the conditions of an activity are known, man seems free. Similar to this standpoint is that of the ordinary individual's obedience or disobedience to the norms of formal religion; in this case the individual "feels" free to obey or disobey. And from the standpoint of the ultimate end of man and his journey towards the fulfilment of his "trust", freedom lies in the degree and kind of development in his understanding which is itself an essential condition in an action situation and its outcome.

A brief discussion of a few problems which are very important in Al-Ghazālī's thought is now in order.

The first is concerned with the body of knowledge in the possession of mankind and the disputes which arise between men concerning truth. Certain important principles must be borne in mind in this regard. First, the knowledge of any particular thing is not complete unless it is understood from the comprehensive perspective of the unity of the universe, i.e. unless it is understood from every possible viewpoint and within the context of the movement of the whole of existence. Second, the kind of understanding that a particular individual has achieved is only a reflection of the stage of development to which his own personality has arrived. On the one hand, a particular aspect of something can only render partial knowledge of its total reality; on the other hand, an individual's understanding of something can only be partial and tentative as long as this individual has not experienced all that which lies in his nature on the level of self-fulfilment. While truth as such is absolute, its understanding is relative to the kind and degree of development in the individual. Its complete expression in words is impossible. Disputes between men are bound to persist both as a result of the differences in their individual understanding and because of the

impossibility of a full linguistic expression of truth. The highest conceivable level of universal agreement cannot exceed the body of knowledge of those phases of existence which lend themselves to linguistic description, i.e., the level of *mu'āmalah*.

Closely related to this problem are the problems of, first, the breadth of perspective in the tracing of causes and, second, the unity of human knowledge from a comprehensive perspective which includes every viewpoint.

Each specialized discipline "sees" reality from a particular viewpoint, and the wider its scope the closer is its comprehension of it. Thus, as an illustration, if God's providence is compared with a man's writing, various disciplines would attribute the cause of writing to various powers, each according to the width of its viewpoint. "The mere physicist (for example) is like an ant who, crawling on a sheet of paper and observing black letters spreading over it, should refer the cause to the pen alone". An astronomer, on the other hand, possesses a wider perspective — he is "like an ant of a wider vision who catches sight of the fingers moving the pen...", and refers the cause to the fingers.<sup>51</sup> Though each of these perspectives is right from its particular viewpoint, the wider the view the closer the observer is to "seeing" the original and real cause of "writing". When the observer, according to this metaphor, can see the whole of man, then he can also "see" that the real "cause" of what is written on the paper is the "heart". He would then be able to "see" that there are intermediary "causes" between the "heart" and the written word, such as the brain, the fingers and the pen, and that the "heart" rules them all. Similarly, the recognition of God's providence is a growth in perspective, at the end of which man discovers that God is the original and real cause of everything and the ruler of all the intermediary causes.

Two points are particularly significant in this metaphor. The first is that the activity of the spirit (the heart) in man serves as a metaphorical illustration of the activity of God in the universe. The second point is one which underlies the spirit of Al-Ghazālī's teachings, namely, that human knowledge is a process which develops from the narrow to the wider perspectives of viewing reality. This process culminates in a comprehensive perspective which relates all viewpoints under the unity of God, and from which each of them is properly understood in its relation to the whole.

(51) *Alchemy*, p. 35.



This principle underlies his philosophy of education and guides his method of exposition on any particular subject. Thus, for example, in his treatment of the love of God,<sup>52</sup> he begins with the most common and ordinary experiences of human inclination towards desirable and concrete objects. Through his analysis of the relationship between the individual and the outside object of desire, he arrives at some fundamental clues concerning the nature of love in man and then proceeds to show how growth in one's understanding of oneself and the corresponding change in viewing the importance of things outside oneself finally leads to love of God only. From this comprehensive perspective one reviews one's attachments to individual things and tries to maximize their importance and significance in life as an act of love to God. This, in general, is Al-Ghazālī's treatment of the various aspects of "religion": the common and ordinary experiences of man yield clues to wider and wider perspectives and ultimately end in the knowledge of God.

Another illustration in the subject of the unity of human knowledge and experience shows a variety of viewpoints and the partial truth in each, and also serves to show the significance of a particular event in the development of the individual and the relativism in "evil". Thus considering illness from a variety of viewpoints, one might find that an ordinary observer of an ill person sees the latter "as a man (who) ceases to take any interest in worldly matters, (who) feels a distaste for common pleasures, and (who) appears sunk in depression". A doctor sees these as symptoms of some disarrangement in the functioning of the sick man's body. A physicist will say, "This is a dryness of the brain caused by hot weather and cannot be relieved till the air becomes moist." An astrologer will attribute it to some planetary phenomenon, and so on. All these students of the same phenomenon "are doubtless right each in his particular branch of knowledge". But none of them, in his particular capacity, possesses a complete understanding of this event, for none of the viewpoints is comprehensive. None of them pursues "causes" to their ultimate relations with the unity of the whole of existence and to God, for "thus far their wisdom has reached," says the *Qur'ān*. None of them "sees (for example) that illness is, so to speak, a cord of love by which God draws to Himself His selected few...", that illness "may turn away (the individual) from the world to His Maker", or that it is "one of those forms of experience by which man

(52) See "The Book of Love and Passion" in the *Iḥyā'*.

arrives at the knowledge of God."<sup>53</sup>

Each of these students possesses a particular viewpoint which yields additional clues to a full understanding of the reality and significance of illness. But none of them can justifiably claim that he alone is in possession of the whole truth. However, due to their ignorance of perspectives other than those they already possess, and due to the different levels of understanding, men, being all motivated by an inherent desire for "lordship", and, in this case, therefore, arrogant, close their minds to viewpoints different from their own and dispute about the truth of what is perceived.

We have already mentioned that such disputes among men are, according to Al-Ghazālī, unavoidable and inescapable, and that no person (or group of persons) has a right to force others to profess and accept his own understanding of truth. We shall see in the next chapter<sup>54</sup> that the fact that not all human beings achieve an understanding of truth from a comprehensive perspective in itself expresses some of God's wisdom and method in perpetuating human society. The following passage summarizes Al-Ghazālī's position in regard to the "relativity" of human understanding and the "absoluteness" of truth:

...owing to the different degrees of perception in people, disputes must arise in tracing effects to causes. Those whose eyes never see beyond the world of phenomena are like those who mistake servants of the lowest rank for the king. The laws of phenomena must be constant, or there will be no such thing as science; but it is a great error to mistake the slaves for the master.<sup>55</sup>

As long as these differences in understanding and in perspective exist, disputes among men must necessarily go on.

Towards the end of his life, Al-Ghazālī, in his *Mishkāt*, expounded a comprehensive philosophy of religion which, based upon the degree of knowledge a particular "god" commanded, formed an all-inclusive scale for classifying particular religions, systems of philosophy and individuals. Al-Ghazālī saw a direct relationship between the kind of "god" to which men devoted their lives and the degree and kind of knowledge required to serve such a "god". But in Al-Ghazālī's system the knowledge of a particular individual reflects his total personality in

(53) *Alchemy*, p. 37.

(54) Also see Appendix .

(55) *Alchemy*, pp. 35-36.



the sense that his understanding of himself and of the outside cannot be isolated from his character in general, from all his virtues, habits and attitudes, or from the goals to which he devotes himself. In this broad sense, therefore, the kind of "god" which men serve governs to a large degree the kind of development potential for their whole personality. Conversely, the kind of personality which people develop mirrors the kind of ends they have been actually serving — i.e., the "god" or "gods" they have been actually worshipping. Thus :

It is surprising how people condemn heathens because they worship stones, while if the reality (in worship) is uncovered and the actual plane of his existence is disclosed to the individual, and illustrated to him..., he will then find himself in the audience of a "pig", prostrating himself before it at one time and kneeling at another, waiting for its gestures and commands. Whenever the "pig" is excited to gratify any of its lusts, the individual immediately moves to serve it and brings that which satisfies it. Or he may find himself attending a mad "dog", enslaved by it, obedient to its demands or wishes, and bound to employ his intellectual vigor in devising tricks to implement this obedience. In all this, the individual actually strives to please his "devil" which excites the "pig" or arouses the "dog" and moves them to its service. In this regard, the individual worships the "devil" by worshipping them.<sup>56</sup>

"Worship", according to Al-Ghazālī, comprehends every activity of the individual; and the Chief End to which these activities are directed, whether articulately conceived or not, is in a real sense the "god" of this individual. Human life has to have some sort of general direction or purpose. This Chief End which people choose to pursue reflects, in one sense, their general philosophy of life, and in another, the direction which to a large degree governs their self-development as devotees to it.

The nature of a particular Chief End implies what may be called a "world view", which mirrors a conception of the universe and the good life, and which therefore implies a view of human nature and its relatedness to the outside and an ethic which reflects this kind of relatedness and whose purpose is the attainment of such an end. Viewed from the standpoint of the individual who wishes to devote

(56) *Iḥyā'*, p. 1363. He uses the terms "pig", "dog" and "devil" to symbolize certain habits to which references have been made.

himself to its achievement, such an End commands a particular kind of self-development in accordance with the requirements of its general nature, the individual's conception of it (which, of course, changes in the degree of insight, but not in the direction of goals as long as the individual persists in pursuing it), and his knowledge of what means are best suited and available to pursue it. Assuming that the individual persists in his pursuit, it would be reasonable to expect that the kind of "intelligence", values, habits and attitudes which he would develop within himself would be consistent with his chosen Chief End.

Al-Ghazālī's purpose in making the "Chief End" by which people direct their lives identical with their real "god" was to show by comparison that the best possible fulfilment of human nature, the highest level of understanding one could achieve, and the best ethic one could live by, could not be conceived or achieved except by the conscious devotion of one's life to God. God as the Chief End is the only End whose nature commands the best self-development. Mere profession of belief in God is not sufficient to ensure the best life. The individual worships God in a true sense only when he devotes his life to knowing Him. We have already seen what this goal demands in self-knowledge and self-discipline and knowledge of the outside. Worship of God alone should require from the individual an examination of whether an activity or an immediate want or a goal is in essence an act of devotion to God or whether it serves some other "god".

The above criteria of the actual object of worship, which were inspired by "Hast thou seen the man who makes *hawā* (self-impulse) his god?",<sup>57</sup> form a comprehensive philosophy of religion and become for Al-Ghazālī the basis of a scale for the classification of individuals, religions and philosophies, according to the nature of the "god" worshipped in each case.

Al-Ghazālī expounds such a classification in many places but most elaborately at the end of his *Mishkāt*.<sup>58</sup> He warns that an accurate classification considering all the variables which produce individual differences is not humanly possible. All that one can do is to point to some major divisions and a few of their sub-divisions to show the important characteristics of each. The terms he actually employs in this context are the "degrees of darkness" for ignorance, and the "degrees

(57) *Qur'ān*; 25 : 43.

(58) *Mishkāt*; pp. 88-90. Following quotations are taken from these pages.



of light" for knowledge, for his *Mishkāt* is an interpretation of the famous "Light-verse" and "Darkness-verse" in the *Qur'ān*.

According to his scale, the major divisions are three and are presented here in brief:

The first consists of those who are "veiled" by pure darkness. These are the atheists "who believe not in Allah, nor the Last Day."<sup>59</sup> or "who love this present life more than that which is to come."<sup>60</sup> These are divided into two subdivisions. First, there are those who desire to discover a cause to account for the world and who make Nature that cause. Since such a "god" has neither knowledge nor perception nor self-consciousness, man is conceived of as just a part of a mechanical order in which purpose and moral responsibility have no meaning. Second, there are those who ignore the quest for causality and are preoccupied only with their *nafs* (appetites and lusts). These are the worshippers of *hawā*. They constitute the majority of mankind and can be further subdivided according to the predominant want they seek to satisfy.

Thus there is one sub-class whose chief aim or "god" is the satisfaction of wants, lusts and animal pleasures, whether these are connected with sex, food, drink or raiment. "Pleasure is their god, the goal of their ambition, and in winning her they believe that they have won felicity." Another sub-class are those who think that man's chief end is conquest and domination. Such men are "veiled" by the ferocious attributes necessary to achieve their ends. A third class are those who suppose that man's chief end is riches and prosperity. "You may see them toiling their lives long, embarking on perils by land, perils by sea, up-dale, down-lea, piling up wealth, and yet grudging it to themselves!" These men are blind to the fact that money is not wanted for its own sake and is not better than gravel unless it is made a means to various ends. A fourth class are those who advance a step higher than the total folly of the last class above and suppose that their supreme felicity lies in the extension of a man's personal reputation and the increase of his following and his influence over others. "You may see these admiring themselves in their own looking-glasses! One of them, who may be suffering hunger and penury at home, will be spending his substance on clothes and trying to look his smartest therein, just in order to avoid contemptuous glances when he walks abroad."

(59) *Qur'ān*; 4: 37.

(60) *Ibid.*, 14: 3.

The varieties among this species are innumerable and the examples given are intended to call attention to their kind in general.

The second major division consists of those who "are veiled by mixed light and darkness". The criterion here is the instrument of knowledge used. Their division consists of three kinds: the senses, the imagination and the intellect.

First, there are those veiled by the darkness of the senses. These persons yearn for the knowledge of a deity and have therefore gone beyond self-absorption, which is the chief characteristic of the first division above. However, they do not transcend the world of sense in their quest for a deity. They range from idol-worshippers to dualists. The idolaters affix Majesty and Beauty and other attributes to sense-perceived bodies and worship these bodies. They are therefore blocked by their senses to seek higher classes of existents.

Another group among these is identified by Al-Ghazālī with certain Turkish tribes which believe that their deity is "some particularly beautiful object; so that when they see a human being of exceptional beauty, or symmetry in a tree, or a horse, etc., they worship it and call it their god." These are one step higher than idolaters, for they are worshippers of Beauty in the absolute, not in the individual. However, their concept of Beauty is still sensory and their deity belongs to the "visible" world. Still another group blocked by the senses specifies some attributes of the deity they should worship. He must be "in essence light, glorious in his express image, majestic in himself, terrible in his presence, intolerant of approach." But such attributes, however, belong to an object of the "visible" world, and are therefore basically sensory.

Those veiled by the darkness of the *imagination* constitute the second major sub-division. These advance beyond the senses and assert the existence of something behind the objects of sense. They remain, however, within the realm of imagination and worship a Being who actually sits on a throne ruling the whole universe. The lowest grade among these are the Corporealists; the highest are those who deny all corporeality and all its accidentals to God except one—direction, and that direction upwards.

The last of this division are those veiled by the rules of the "intellect". The use of intellect takes these beyond all reference to direction or dimension, but their conception of God's attributes is relative to their own. Some of them declare that God speaks in sound and voice like



ours; others advance a step higher and say that God's speech is "like our thought-speech, both soundless and letterless". When these people are challenged to show that "hearing, sight, etc." are *real* in God, they have to fall back, by the rules of their intellect, to what is essentially anthropomorphism, though they formerly repudiated it.

The third and final major division consists of those veiled with pure light. These also fall into several classes. The lowest class comprise those who have searched for and grasped the idea that, when the divine attributes are named, it is not according to our human mode of nomenclature. This has led them to avoid altogether describing God by His attributes, but instead to refer to His creation "as Moses did in his answer to Pharaoh, when the latter asked, 'And what, pray, is the Lord of the universe?' and he replied, 'The Lord, Whose Holiness transcends even the ideas of these attributes, He, the Mover and Orderer of the heavens.'" <sup>61</sup>

The second and third classes mount still higher for these classes comprise the mystics who "see" the unity of all under One.

(61) *Qur'ān*, 26 : 23 ff.

## CHAPTER V

### THE WORLD AND HUMAN SOCIETY

The term "World" in this chapter generally refers to "life in this world" which is indicated by the term *duynā* in Muslim thought. According to Al-Ghazālī, *dunyā* stands for : "1) certain concrete things, 2) the pleasure which man derives from them, and 3) the improvements he adds to them for his benefit."<sup>1</sup> The "heart" possesses two relationships with the objects of man's needs. One is expressed in "its love of them, the pleasure it derives from them, and its preoccupation with them...". The other relationship is expressed in the labor needed "to improve these concrete things to fit man's pleasures..." Included under this second relationship are all the crafts and professions which engage man with the outside. Whatever improvement man introduces to things in their state of nature for the sake of his needs and pleasures is an aspect of his *āunyā*.

The "heart" is also the seat of "knowledge and experience" through which *sa'ādah*, the ultimate end of man, may be attained. The "heart" is the residence of the spirit, and it is the spirit which is the knower in man and which will know reality and God. But the "heart", in order to attend to the needs of the body — which is the "mount" of the spirit in travelling toward its goal — is created to derive pleasure from what satisfies the needs of the body and to derive pain from the neglect of them. The "heart" is also created with "anger" so that it may defend the body and any of its members from danger and secure it from destruction. The "heart" is thus the point of connection in which man's "worldly" activities (*dunyā*) and man's religious activities (*dīn*) meet. In it, man acquires "knowledge and experience" which is the road to his *sa'ādah*, while through its pleasures and "anger", man attends to the health and survival of the body.

We have seen how the pleasures and "anger" of the "heart" are capable of developing indefinitely if left uncontrolled by self-discipline, how the "heart" may become totally preoccupied in serving them, and

(1) See Appendix to this Chapter; quotations following this are from the Appendix.



how such a preoccupation prevents self-development in "knowledge and experience" towards self-fulfilment. We have also mentioned that the spirit of man, being created in the likeness of God, possesses the desire for "lordship". This attribute expresses itself in "this world" in man's desire and efforts to master things outside himself, including other human beings.

Man may seek to possess the bodies of other human beings for their services and exploitation, such as boys; or to enjoy them, such as wives and slave girls. Or, he may seek to possess the hearts of human beings by planting in them his grandeur and importance, which is what is meant by 'prestige', for the meaning of 'prestige' is the possession of the hearts of human beings.

Accordingly, man has to discipline the development of his appetites and "anger" in such a manner that the things needed for their satisfaction will not preoccupy the "heart" to the extent of preventing it from the pursuit of knowledge, thus defeating the primary purpose for which man was created. Self-discipline is indispensable to the attainment of *sa'ādah*, for without it, man's appetites, his "anger" and his desire for "lordship" would ultimately enslave the development of the "heart" in seeking, acquiring and accumulating those things which become its needs as a result of their uncontrolled development. A "heart" which becomes the slave of these aspects of human nature develops those qualities which are needed in serving these aspects. These qualities are "arrogance, miserliness, envy, hypocrisy, desire for recognition, suspiciousness, obsequiousness, love of issue, love of praise and boastfulness". We have seen that self-discipline, besides fortifying the freedom of the "heart" in its quest for truth, establishes within it those virtues which enable it to see that man is created in the likeness of God.

*Sa'ādah* is the highest state of being possible for the "heart". This state of being is only one of various possibilities in the development of the "heart", and in order to be attained should govern all the "heart's" activities in the process of its development. These activities are, generally speaking, divided into those which belong to *dunyā*, as this term is defined above, and those which belong to *dīn*, i.e. those activities which are directed towards the accumulation of "knowledge and experience" and the establishment of virtues. Both kinds of activities are united in the "heart" and the same activity may belong in one sense to *dunyā* and in another to *dīn*. The pursuit of knowledge, for example, is the means to attain *sa'ādah* and brings its seeker closer to God. It also

rewards him with "dignity and power (*'izz*), the majesty of piety (*waqār*), and the authority to judge Kings,"<sup>2</sup> all ends which belong to *dunyā*. Similarly, eating is essentially an activity of *dunyā*, but it also belongs to *dīn*, for without it survival is not possible, and without survival the "heart" cannot seek *sa'ādah*. An hierarchy of values to determine the relative importance of activities, if *sa'ādah* is the ultimate goal, becomes necessary. The rest of this chapter is concerned with this problem.

A translation of a long section from "The Book of the Blameworthiness of the World" from the *Ihyā'* is appended to this chapter. This section is a part of a Book in the *Ihyā'* where Al-Ghazālī discusses the importance of things in the outside world to human ends and the proper relatedness of the individual to them. This section discusses what would be entitled today "The Origins and Development of Human Society". This is the title of the translation although it does not appear in the original. It is given to the translation to suggest the general nature of the subject matter, though it may be misleading in some ways. It was not Al-Ghazālī's primary interest to expound a theory of the origins of society and its development. His main purpose, rather, was to show through an investigation of how human society originates and develops that, although society existed in the first place to satisfy certain essential needs without which no human being can survive, it develops to such complexity that the goals and things which engage most human beings in it and which are created in the process of its development may easily absorb the seeker of truth and lead him away from his search for knowledge of God.

As a whole the section speaks for itself and is highly instructive. The language and organization of thought are very clear, and a student of society could learn much beyond the few conclusions discussed here. In a sense, this section describes Muslim society at the time of Al-Ghazālī, i.e., the late Eleventh and early Twelfth centuries, A.D. But it is intended to be both a theory of social development and a warning to the seeker of truth.

From the standpoint of a life of self-fulfilment the essential needs of the body are : food, drink, raiment and shelter. The individual's survival is dependent upon the satisfaction of these needs, for he is incapable of satisfying them alone. Cooperation among human beings

(2) *Ihyā'*, p. 12.



through division of labor is necessary to prepare and acquire the objects of human needs. Human society arises inevitably as a result of the individual's inability to live alone. That its coming into existence is necessary reveals God's wisdom, both in creating such needs in human beings on the one hand, and in making individuals incapable of satisfying them alone on the other. God has, in order to make the existence of society inevitable, also created in each individual an inescapable desire for human companionship. In other words, in fashioning human nature in the manner He did, God has made human society a necessity.

But once society comes into existence new problems in human association and cooperation arise. These are thoroughly discussed step by step in the appended section in accordance with the stages in social development. Each stage is creative of further problems and needs and, therefore, demands further development.

Two central issues are emphasized in this section. The first indicates that complexity in the growth of human society is inevitable and that the arts, professions and institutions which come into existence as a result of the needs created by each particular stage in social development themselves give rise to further needs which will demand further development. Accordingly, human society is bound to grow in complexity forever. But, and this is the second point, from the standpoint of the individual whose ambition is to attain *sa'adah* and to know God, the most serious question is that what exists in a complex society in the form of things and ambitions are not important enough to keep him from dedicating himself to *sa'adah*.

The individual is born in a complex society in which a variety of goals and many desired things already exist. His heart loves these things and derives great pleasure from them. He sees that certain achievements in society bring status and prestige, and would give him power over things and over other human beings. In other words, regardless of how complex a society becomes and regardless of how unnecessary the things and goals it offers, these things and goals possess strong connections with human nature in its basic constitution. The human appetites, the derivative emotions of "anger" and the human desire for "lordship" "mature" earlier than the "heart's" delight in knowledge and truth. They are inherent in human nature and man cannot escape their drive to seek objects of their satisfaction.

A particular society or a particular stage in social development means, insofar as the individual's self-development is concerned, the

existence of specific things and specific goals as objects of desire. Some or many of these things and goals may be different in different societies or at different stages of development in the same society. But the bases in human nature which urge men to seek the specific things and specific goals which their society offers are the same, regardless of time or place. It is not what specific things and goals men choose to acquire; it is rather what in their human nature drives them to seek those things and goals. If appetite, "anger" and the desire for "lordship" are the bases of men's ambitions, then the general effect on the development of their "hearts" would be the same, regardless of the differences in objects of their ambitions that a particular society offers. The individual, in whatever society or age he exists, should realize what it is in himself that is at the basis of his ambitions. Is it primarily the need of his spirit to acquire "knowledge and experience" of the works of God, or is it primarily the need of his appetites, "anger" and desire for "lordship"?

But by setting the problem in this manner, these two questions may imply that the best life of self-development is a choice between two alternatives. Actually they are one question viewed from a totality of life towards happiness. This question is: "How much care and effort should the individual exert in satisfying the needs of each part of his nature in order to attain happiness?" The individual cannot possibly escape attending to the needs of each of the various aspects of his nature. He is subject to the existence of everything in himself. He can, however, control the degree of his engagement; for the needs of each of the various aspects of his nature are neither definite nor static. They expand or contract according to the development of that aspect relative to the personality as a whole. His problem is to realize how each aspect of his nature should develop so that its needs may not eventually grow to preoccupy his "heart" more than is necessary for the achievement of his ultimate end.

This problem, however, is all the more difficult when it is viewed not in retrospect from the level of self-fulfilment but from the starting point of self-development. In the process of self-development, the various appetites and "anger" appear and mature earlier than the "heart's" delight in knowledge and wisdom and its understanding of the principles which should govern the unfolding of self-development towards happiness. The demands of appetites and "anger" are predominant in the early stages of self-development when there is still little and vague knowledge in the "heart" to control them. We should recall



that such control is an act of the "will". But the "will" to act in a certain manner is itself the product of some knowledge, i.e. the product of the contents of the "heart" at the time of action. In the early stages of self-development, the "heart's" predominant experiences are the pleasures of appetites and "anger". This knowledge it possesses as actual and immediate experiences.

But by its *fiṭrah*, the heart possesses the urge "to know and experience" the works of God. The satisfaction of this urge is, as we have seen, intimately connected with a life of self-discipline. But the principles of self-discipline are accepted by the seeker of truth on *sam'*, i.e. faith in the statements of others. The seeker of truth has to be a *muqallid* (imitator) in the early stage of his self-development. The actual and immediate experiences of his "heart" are still not sufficient to make these principles an actual possession of his "heart". Following them in the early stages is self-imposed, for the seeker is very conscious of the conflict in his "heart" between the demands of what is already actual, in it, (i.e. the experiences of the pleasures of appetites and "anger") and the dictates of *sam'*. The former are the more actual, and hence the stronger, and most people are likely to follow them and become more and more preoccupied with them as they grow up.

*Sam'* in its general sense is the knowledge and wisdom existing in society. But for the individual whose understanding of knowledge and wisdom starts chiefly with sense-perception, the chief source of *sam'* in his early days is observation. The members of his society who have actually attained "prestige" serve as concrete models which inspire a variety of definite goals and indicate definite ways of achieving them. According to Al-Ghazālī, whether an individual seeks knowledge and wisdom or not is largely governed by the kind of achievements which bring "prestige" in his own society as well as by the particular circumstances which influence his selection of personal goals among those which his society offers and recognizes. In a society where the highest "prestige" is attached to those who attain knowledge and wisdom, more individuals will seek this goal than in another where more "prestige" is attached to other achievements.

The quest for happiness requires the seeker to distinguish between those which are important and necessary among the things and goals which exist in society and those which are not. His basis for such distinction, so far as his personal knowledge is concerned, cannot be more than a general orientation, which serves as a guidepost in his

disciplining of his self-development but which is nevertheless necessary to fortify him against becoming preoccupied with those goals in society that are extremely tempting but which would defeat his purpose.

In order to warn the novice seeker of knowledge against the temptation of becoming preoccupied with the ambitions and goals which engage most people around him and which have proved to be rewarding in pleasure and "prestige", Al-Ghazālī felt the need to explain the reasons for their existence and the limitations inherent in their nature. The seeker of knowledge needs from society what can guarantee his good health and survival. The existence of society itself is essential for these needs. But in the process of its development, many things, crafts, professions, institutions, etc., come into existence which not only are not needed in a life of self-fulfilment but which are extremely tempting to the individual in his early stages of development. An examination of the reasons for the existence of these things, of which aspect in human nature they attract and preoccupy, and how they influence self-development, gives the beginner a perspective of their relative importance. This perspective may enable him to surmount the difficulties of self-discipline in his early development. This seems to be the main purpose of the section appended to this chapter.

However, the section as a whole should be read as a part of this chapter, for although it is addressed primarily to the seeker of truth, it discusses thoroughly Al-Ghazālī's conception of the laws and principles which govern the origins and development of human society. One of the most important points made by Al-Ghazālī is that the preservation of human society is chiefly due to the fact that most people become engaged in the pursuit of what tempts their appetites, "anger" and desire for "lordship". The preservation of human society is one of the divine purposes which the existence of these aspects of human nature makes possible.

But God has made in their [most people's] oversight and ignorance the preservation of society and the welfare of people [possible]. Actually all worldly affairs are preserved by the oversight and petty ambitions of men. If men were all wise and their ambitions high [i.e., to seek knowledge and experience of the works of God], they would refrain from worldly endeavors. And if they refrained, the means of living would come to an end, people would perish, and all the pious would perish with them.



So far as things in themselves are concerned, the *Qur'ān* declares that nothing which exists exists in vain. There has to be some purpose served by the existence of anything. From this point of view, nothing is bad. But from that of the attainment of *sa'ādah*, things are "good" or "bad" according to the influence they have on the self-development of the individual towards self-fulfilment. Al-Ghazālī discusses the "goodness" or "badness" of things from six different approaches in "The Book of Endurance and Gratitude" in the *Ihyā'*. These are briefly paraphrased here.

First : Things may be divided into those which are useful for both the worldly life (*dunyā*) and the life of the spirit, such as knowledge and virtues; those which are harmful for both, such as ignorance and vices; those which are immediately useful but harmful in the end, such as indulgence in sensuous pleasures; and finally those which are immediately harmful and painful, but useful in the end, such as the disciplining of appetites.

Second : As for things which are exclusively for this world (this excludes knowledge and virtues), things are compounds in which the good and the evil are mingled. Some are predominantly but rarely perfectly good, such as wealth, family and children, kinsmen and social status. Other things possess more good than evil; and still other things possess more evil than good, such as great wealth. However, the goodness or badness of every one of these things is relative to its influence on the person concerned.

Third : Things may be divided from the point of view of ends and means. First, certain things are ends in themselves, such as the bliss of the Beatific Vision and eternal felicity. Second, some things are means to other things and possess no intrinsic value, such as money. Third, there are those things which at the same time are ends in themselves and means to others, such as good health and survival. Such things, besides being good in themselves, enable man to pursue both his worldly as well as his spiritual ends. What is sought only for its own sake is the true good. What is sought for its own sake as well as for the sake of other things is also good, but inferior to the former. Finally, what is sought only for the sake of other things is not good in itself but is merely a necessary means.

Fourth : Good things may be described as pleasant, useful, or beautiful. The pleasant is felt immediately; the useful is judged from the view of ultimate ends, and the beautiful is gratifying at all times and

situations. Bad things possess the opposite qualities in that they are painful, harmful, or ugly. Things are absolutely good when they possess the three qualities of the good — *i.e.*, utility, pleasure and beauty. Knowledge and wisdom belong to this class. Similarly, things are absolutely bad when they possess all the qualities of evil — *i.e.*, harm, pain and ugliness. Ignorance is of this class. But most things are actually combinations of the above six qualities of both the good and the bad. Amputation of a limb, for example, is painful and ugly but useful when necessary. Things are as useful and important as the ends they serve. Thus knowledge, virtues, good deeds and faith are the most useful of things, for they serve the highest end of man — his happiness.

The fifth approach is to identify the good with everything pleasant. But pleasures in relation to man are either spiritual or physical (bodily). The former kind of pleasure is peculiar to man; the latter he shares some with some animals and some with all animals. Pleasures may then be arranged in a hierarchy according to how many of the animal species experience them. The more animals who share in a certain pleasure, the lower this pleasure is in the hierarchy of honor and goodness. Accordingly, the hierarchy of the goodness of pleasures would be in the form of a pyramid, the base of which would be what all animals share, and narrowing up towards what is peculiar to man, and finally to what is peculiar to the deepest recesses of his spirit. Another way of looking at the hierarchy of goodness in pleasure is to ask which of the faculties or parts of man experiences a particular pleasure. Thus, knowledge and wisdom, being the pleasures of the spirit, are the highest in goodness. Knowledge and wisdom are the least common pleasures, not only among the animal species but also among human beings, for the faculty they please is the least developed and hence the least common.

The inability of most people to experience the pleasure of knowledge is due to, first, their lack of having experienced [*dhawq* — literally "taste"] knowledge. He who does not taste does not desire, for desire proceeds from experienced taste. Second, corruption in their [developed] constitution (*mizāj*) and a sickness in their heart as a result of their indulgence in appetites. Such persons are similar to the sick man who does not taste the sweetness of the honey and fancies it bitter. Third, incompleteness in their constitution — *i.e.*, when the faculty by which they enjoy knowledge is not yet developed, such as in the case of children.<sup>3</sup>

(3) *Ihyā'*, p. 2245.



Some of the pleasures which man shares with animals are authority, leadership, conquest and victory. The lion, tiger and other animals enjoy similar pleasures. Those which man shares with all animals are those which pertain to the stomach and sex. These are the most frequent and most common of all pleasures. Yet they are the most inferior, which is why "every creature that moves or crawls shares in them — even worms and insects".

The hierarchy of goodness which the spiritual and physical pleasures reflect corresponds to the natural development of the individual human being. In his first stages of life he is better equipped to enjoy what pleases his physical appetites. As he grows up and develops new faculties and accumulates experiences, his pleasures advance to the next higher stage, that of authority, and so on. His highest stage of development is that in which knowledge and wisdom are his greatest pleasures.

According to this measure of development, there are actually four types of developed human personalities. First, there are persons who love nothing save God and forever seek a richer knowledge of Him. Second, there are those persons, ignorant of the pleasure of knowledge or the meaning of fellowship (*'uns*) with God, whose greatest pleasures lie in wielding authority, in possessing wealth and in gratifying their appetites. Third, there are persons halfway between these two types, but who lean more towards the first; and fourth, persons who are also toward the middle but who lean more towards the second.

The first type, though possible, is extremely rare. The world "overflows" with the second type while the third and fourth types are less abundant. The goodness of a certain society or a period in history is reflected by the number of persons in the third type.

Finally, the sixth view combines all the good in one single end. This is the ultimate end of man, which is eternal felicity. Everything else is a means to this end. Some of these means are more immediate and more specialized for the attainment of this end than others, such as the virtues of the heart. Following these in immediacy and importance is the body, which carries the heart, and following the body are all the means which contribute to its health and survival, such as wealth, family and kinship. There is still a fourth kind of means, which acts to integrate and harmonize all the three kinds of means — this is God's subtle guidance and grace.

The virtues of the heart include the knowledge of *mukāshafah* (mystical knowledge), the knowledge of *mu'āmalah* (non-mystical), moderation,

and justice (in the Platonic sense). These virtues presuppose the virtues of the body, namely good health, ability, beauty and long life. The latter virtues are not ordinarily possible except through some external good, such as wealth, family status and nobility of birth. But

all these external and bodily means are not useful (to the heart) except through the fourth kind [God's grace] which combines them and everything else which is favorable to the [cultivation] of the heart's inner virtues.<sup>4</sup>

This fourth kind includes God's subtle guidance, His teachings, His correcting and His support.

Then Al-Ghazālī asks: "How could these worldly endeavors contribute to the achievement of eternal felicity?" As to wealth, a poor person is usually handicapped by his poverty in pursuing knowledge or giving expression to virtuous traits such as liberality. As to the members of the family, they assist the individual and enable him to save much of his time and energy in attending to the needs of his body and survival. The individual's experiences in his associations with his family and kinsmen teach him love, loyalty and cooperation, and consequently give him a sense of justice. The family and kinsmen also surround him with dignity and status, which protect him from abuse and subjugation to others, as God says:

Now if God did not beat off one set of the people by means of others, the world would have gone corrupt. But God is bounteous to the world.<sup>5</sup>

Thus a prospective husband should avoid for the mother of his children "the beautiful woman brought up on a bad home" (a tradition), and should seek "the healthy and the competent" (another tradition), in order to guarantee the nobility (in character) of his issue.

As to bodily virtues, the consensus is that all are good, except that there are some differences concerning the value of beauty. The value of beauty in facilitating worldly matters and pleasant human relations is not a secret.

It is a kind of a power. [Actually] in most cases beauty reflects a virtuous soul, for when the light of the soul is complete, it glows forth to the body... that is why it is said that "the face and the eyes are the mirrors of the inside". For this reason also

(4) *Ibid.*, p. 2249.

(5) *Qur'ān*, 2 : 251.



the face reveals anger, happiness, or sorrow... and the Prophet said: "Seek the good from those of beautiful countenance (*ṣibāḥ al-wujūh*)."<sup>6</sup>

But these same bodily and external means can also be the sources of evil ends, of misery, and may lead one astray from felicity. In conclusion, "the worldly goods are mixtures, the medicinal is mixed with the pain, the desirable with danger, and the useful with harm".

Underlying the discussion of human ends and means is the principle of harmony among the purposes of all things involved in the spiritual career of man. Whether a thing is a part of man or external to man and needed by him, it is judged by its importance in the life of man viewed as a whole. Its goodness or badness depends upon its influence on his life in *dunyā* (this world).

Al-Ghazālī then proceeds to examine in detail the importance of things in the life of the universe as a whole.<sup>7</sup> He begins with human anatomy, physiology and psychology to show the importance of everything in human nature in the development of a harmonious personality.<sup>8</sup> He proceeds to investigate harmony and unity in the universe itself in both the "visible" and "invisible" aspects of it. His main purpose in these investigations — which, it should be remembered, are on the level of *mu'āmalah* — is to point out clues that would lead to a knowledge of the unity and harmony existing among all things in the universe. Such knowledge leads to the knowledge of the wisdom of God in creating things as they are, to His unity as expressed in the unity of all things, and to His absolute sovereignty over each "individual" thing as well as over the universe as a whole.

Islām has to be a complete picture of the entire universal order, and Al-Ghazālī was aware of this. The Book of the *Ihyā'* under discussion expounds his view of the universal order. Everything has to be understood in its relation to the life of the whole universe and the purposes it serves in this life. Some of the purposes in the existence of things are obvious to the ordinary eye while others are not.

Everything in existence, great or small, is an immediate "servant" of God. This principle is one of the most important ideas in the doctrine of the unity of existence. While something is a part of a larger whole,

(6) *Ihyā'*, p. 2252.

(7) *Ibid.*, p. 2259 ff.

(8) *Ibid.*, pp. 2259-2270.

its existence as such serves some purposes of God; and thus viewed as an "individual" thing in itself, it serves a multiplicity of purposes in its functions in the larger whole, its relations to other parts, its influence on them, and, directly or indirectly, on all the outside.

Accordingly, all the "individual" members in man and all the particular aspects of his nature, besides being parts of the whole of man, are immediate "servants" of God's purposes. An adequate understanding of man, then, should take into consideration how the "visible" members in man, such as his fingers, hands, eyes, etc., and the "invisible" aspects of his nature, such as his appetites, anger, imagination, intellect, spirit, etc., are immediate "servants" of God. These individual parts may be divided into more and more individual constituents, but regardless of how small a part is, it will still be an immediate "servant" of God.

An understanding of anything, whether it is a "whole" or a part of a whole, should consider the wisdom in its existence, *i.e.*, should consider its role, functioning importance and influence on all other things, those immediately related to it as well as those indirectly related. If, for example, we consider the wisdom in the existence of "appetites" in man, we should investigate the purpose their existence serves and in what sense they are immediate "servants" of God. It is not possible to mention here all of the purposes served by the existence of "appetites". Such an endeavor would eventually lead to a consideration of the unity and interdependence which exist in the life of everything in existence, with "appetites" as the central point of reference. We have already mentioned some of the purposes served by "appetites" in various contexts.

We have previously seen how the kind of development which takes place in "appetites" in a particular individual is an important condition in the kind of virtues, habits, wants and goals, and even the kind of "intelligence" which this individual develops. In this capacity, "appetites" are some of God's servants which put man on "trial" (*ibtīlā'*) regarding the kind of fulfilment in his "Trust". God "tests" man by creating in human nature things which are capable of obstructing his fulfilment. One may consider how certain things in the outside possess a strong attraction for human appetites, and consider the wisdom in this relationship and see how such things also serve this purpose of God. One would also see how these outside things are themselves influenced by the existence of appetites in man. We may follow this line of thought infinitely and consider the purposes served by "appetites" in human



history, in nature, ... etc. Similarly, we may consider other aspects in human nature — the bodily (visible) and the spiritual (invisible) — and investigate how each is a "servant" of God.

Such considerations would bring us closer to the understanding of the principle that the human being is in reality obeying God in every instance of his life by being a subject to all the "servants" of God, which comprise everything — the "visible" and the "invisible" — in existence. Here again we may see that the individual's freedom lies in his understanding of all these various "servants" of God and how the existence of each contributes to or obstructs the process of his self-fulfilment.

Accordingly, "a man of 'insight' (*baṣīrah*) does not see nor does he conceive of anything in the universe without investigating God's bounty and wisdom in its existence". After having arrived at such knowledge, his "submission" (*islām*) to God insofar as the utility of things is concerned, is "to use every bounty (*fadl*) [*i.e.*, anything which contributes to the welfare of man] in a manner which would fulfil the divine wisdom for which it exists."<sup>9</sup> The use of things in this manner is *ṭā'ah*, or moral obedience to and "worship" of God. First, there is the obligation to investigate and understand every existing thing. But man has one primary interest in such an investigation. It is to find out the wisdom in the existence of things, *i.e.*, to find out the purposes for which that particular thing exists and the importance of its existence in the life of the whole universe. Naturally, this requires investigating the object in itself as well as all its relations with the outside. Among these relations is the fact that this object has existed as a possibility by *ḥaqq*. In other words, in order to understand its "individuality", the man of "insight" has to understand all the past that made it, first, possible and, second, what it was. Then he has to "see" it in its context as a condition in the life of the outside as well as a product of such conditioning by the outside. Such an investigation proceeds from the level of *mu'āmalah*, *i.e.* the realm of "science", to that of *mukāshafah*. On the latter level he "sees" every thing as a part of a harmonious whole fulfilling the various purposes for which it came into existence under the absolute sovereignty of God by *ḥaqq*.

Second, there is the utility of things to man himself. Whether a man uses things "properly" or not depends upon whether his use contributes to or obstructs his development towards self-fulfilment. The best

(9) *Ibid.*, p. 2283.

purposes which things needed by man serve are those which contribute towards his self-fulfilment. Man's *ṭā'ah* (obedience to God) lies in his use of things in accordance with the "best" purposes they serve. Man's "worship" (*ibādah*), however, exceeds the realm of his *ṭā'ah*. He is created, according to the *Qur'ān*, to be the "viceregent" (*khalīfah*) of God on earth. One of the applications of this "viceregency" is an active role in the enhancement of the "best" purposes intended in the existence of things. This role depends upon the degree of understanding the individual has acquired. His understanding as a "condition" in a situation influences the outcome, and this outcome is "better" or "worse" according to his degree of understanding of the purposes served by the things involved in the situation.

Another aspect of "worship" is the joy and gratitude which a man of "insight" feels concomitantly with his understanding of the bounties of God. Most people, however, live unaware of *all* these bounties. The chief reason for their unawareness is their dominating awareness of the importance of things needed in the satisfaction of their developed individual desires and goals. Thus, "they do not consider something which is of universal benefit and which is secure for all under all circumstances a bounty". They do not consider such things as air, water, etc., as bounties, "for these are accessible to everybody, and exist in abundance. Not everyone 'sees' in such things a private possession, the use of which is limited to himself, and hence does not consider them as bounties."<sup>10</sup>

Al-Ghazālī attributes this lack of awareness to the fact that the strongest impulse in every human being is self-love. An expression of this impulse is the desire of each to live an immortal existence. People who have developed specific desires and goals fancy that their continued existence is guaranteed by securing those things which satisfy these desires and goals. Consequently, the bounties they are most aware of and the things they love most are those which they deem capable of preventing their death. Their unawareness of what their survival really depends upon, and their ignorance of the needs of what is immortal in themselves, determine what things they actually love. They spend their time and energy, therefore, in acquiring and accumulating those things whose possession they feel guarantees their survival and protects them against death. The things which men seek and to which they

(10) *Ibid.*, p. 2283.



dedicate their ambitions reflect their kind of self-development, their understanding of themselves and of the importance of things on the outside.

Two important problems arise from this discussion. First, how are the objects of love determined by the degree and kind of understanding? Second, is man immortal? And if so, what is it in him that is immortal? These questions are discussed extensively in various places in Al-Ghazālī's writings and space here does not permit more than a few remarks about them.

The intimate relationship between the objects of love and the kind and degree of understanding which an individual acquires of himself and of the outside is discussed by Al-Ghazālī in various contexts, but particularly in "The Book of Love and Passion" in the *Ihyā'*. This book is one of Al-Ghazālī's most significant, for it constitutes one of the clearest applications of his theory of knowledge in which the quest for truth and human psychology are interrelated in a process of total self-development. According to his views, love is essentially a passionate inclination towards an outside object. The foremost and most essential condition in love is the ability of the lover to perceive and know the object of love, for "love is inconceivable without some knowledge and some understanding [of the outside object]." <sup>11</sup>

As such, love is not a passion peculiar to man but is a distinctive characteristic of all living creatures. All living creatures exhibit a passionate disposition towards certain objects, and each in its own mode of "perception" selects what is agreeable to itself and avoids what is not agreeable.

According to Al-Ghazālī's analysis, love has three primary origins in human nature: first, in pleasure; second, in man's delight in knowledge; and third, in self-love. Naturally, all are interrelated.

As to the first, there is a natural inclination in man towards any object from which he derives pleasure. This inclination becomes a "passionate attachment" (*ishq*), when the experience of pleasure "is strengthened and becomes deeply rooted in the 'heart', i.e., when this pleasure has become an important part of the make-up of the 'heart' in its development. An opposite emotion (*maqt*, lit. disgust and hate) is established in the development of the 'heart' towards an object from which it has experienced severe pain. The depth of *ishq* or *maqt* in

(11) *Ibid.*, p. 2584.

the "heart" depends primarily upon (1) frequency, and (2) the other two sources of love — i.e., upon delight in knowledge, and self-love.

As to the second source of love, i.e., delight in knowledge, the objects of love may be conveniently divided according to the faculty which perceives them. Each faculty possesses a unique kind of perception and, therefore, "selects" from the outside a class of perceptibles peculiar to its nature. Its objects of love and, consequently, its objects of *ushq* or *maqt* are the class of existents which it is capable of "knowing". The objects of *ishq* or *maqt* of sight, for example, are different from those of hearing, and so on. <sup>12</sup> Now, man is differentiated from the rest of living creatures by his "mind, 'light', 'heart', or whatever you prefer of these names." <sup>13</sup> The objects of knowledge and, consequently, the objects of *ishq* or *maqt*, are therefore, peculiar to man alone.

The third source of love — self-love — is the more important to our purpose here. It is better to let Al-Ghazālī speak here:

The foremost object of love of every living creature is its own self. The meaning of self-love is that in its nature there is a desire to be immortal and an aversion to become non-being, ... for what could be more agreeable to oneself than one's own self and one's eternal survival? That is why man loves immortality and hates death and killing...

In the same way that eternal survival is loved, so is perfect survival loved also, for imperfect survival is not complete survival. Incomplete survival is the non-being of whatever is wanting to perfect survival. Man views what is wanting to his perfect survival as though it were dead. He hates 'death' and "non-being" for his attributes as well as for whatever would make his survival perfect, in the same way as he hates them for his essential being. He loves to possess whatever makes him perfect, as well as the eternal survival of his essence. This is instinctive in human nature by the *sunnah* of God. <sup>14</sup>

Now the objects of love, insofar as self-love is concerned, are those things which are deemed instrumental in the eternal and perfect survival

(12) It should be remembered that the "heart" is involved in sight and the other sense-perceptions. The senses as such are only "doorways" which connect the "heart" with the outside, each in its own way. The resulting "impression" on the "heart" is sense-perception.

(13) *Ihyā'*, p. 2585.

(14) *Ibid.*, pp. 2585-6.



of the individual. The individual loves his children, his family, kinsmen and friends, "not for their own sake but because his chance for eternal and perfect survival is tied up with them..." In the case of children, for example, though their care "is somewhat of a burden, man loves them, for he sees in his issue a kind of immortality for himself. His love for his eternal survival is so great that he loves the eternal survival of those who are his substitutes, and who are a part of him after he has given up the hope for his own eternal survival". He feels himself "many" and hence strengthened by his immediate relations and kinsmen, and he endows his own personality with their achievements and prestige. Thus, "kinsmen, wealth and all external means are like the wings which complement the individual."<sup>15</sup>

Man is also "enslaved" by the love of those who contribute to his eternal and perfect survival; he loves the physician and the teacher and anyone who enables him to become complete. For the same reason, he loves food, drink and money, for these are means to things which would make him more secure in survival and closer to being complete. Food and money in excess of his personal needs are means to his "prestige" which, as we have seen, is one way of possessing the "hearts" of others.

But whether something can be loved for its own sake without any contribution to man's desire for eternal and perfect survival is, Al-Ghazālī admits, a disputable question. Al-Ghazālī's position is in the affirmative. When something is loved for its own sake and not as a means to gratify a desire (*ḥazz*), i.e., when it in itself is the desire, then this is real and "mature" (*bāligh*) love whose permanence is certain. Such love is the love of Beauty, Goodness, ... etc.

You should not think that the love of beautiful objects is not conceivable except when the gratification of some lust is involved. The gratification of lust is a different kind of pleasure. Beautiful objects such as water, green (scenery), beautiful sights, flowers, birds and geometrical figures may be loved for their own selves, not for the utility they may serve. Man is relieved from his worries and depressions merely by looking at such things, without any expectation of using them.

At this point Al-Ghazālī suggests that we should reconsider from a fresh viewpoint human love for the things which are loved as "instru-

(15) *Ibid.*, p. 2586.

ments" of self-love, in order to see that none of these is purely "instrumental". Each object of love embodies Beauty and Goodness, and consequently our love of it is in reality partly for its "instrumental" value and partly for its own self. Now these are the sources of love in human nature. Several emotions, traits and attitudes are derived from these sources. It is not possible to discuss these here.

Al-Ghazālī's primary purpose in "the Book of Love and Passion" was to show that only God as an object of love offers and requires the highest level of self-development. This Book in the *Ihyā'* is one of the greatest analytical essays on love. The love of God, like everything else in human development, is rooted in human nature, and in its development passes through the very ordinary experiences of man. In the process of its development, however, it may be thwarted by becoming strongly attached to things which are fancied to secure to the person concerned eternal and perfect survival. Al-Ghazālī discusses in detail such feelings and attitudes as *shawq*, 'uns, *riḍā*, and other emotions experienced by man in an ordinary human love relationship, in order to point out how these experiences themselves serve as clues in seeking God as the ultimate object of Love.

We have seen in the last chapter how the unity of God as a principle serves as a comprehensive perspective which directs and eventually integrates the variety of the experiences, knowledge and virtues of the seeker of truth. God as the ultimate and only real object of love serves the same purpose. The love of God is a goal which offers the individual seeker a scale of importance regarding the things he needs in his self-development. It does not require him to eradicate the pleasures and delights he experiences from outside things, nor does it require him to depart from self-love. But it demands from him that he develop himself in a direction in which self-love is the love of a completely unfolded and fulfilled self that may become *al-nafs al-muṭma'innah* (the tranquil self), in whom the pleasures, delights and self-love of the spirit have become actual experiences and knowledge acquired in a total self-development which, as we have seen, is a disciplined development in which the entire range of existence and human nature are actually experienced and known. The love of God as a goal fortifies the seeker against becoming too engrossed in what gives him pleasure and security at a stage in his development when the demands of his appetites, "anger", and the desire for 'lordship' have not yet been sufficiently tamed.

Love of God, like belief in the unity of God, is a goal. Dedication



on the part of the seeker to reach these goals disposes him to pursue truth and understanding indefinitely. In the process of his self-development, lesser objects and goals which would otherwise absorb his attention, being fancied as securing for him his "eternal survival and perfection", are seen in their proper scale of importance. As he seeks God, his understanding constantly increases and, consequently, his sense of the importance of things to himself constantly changes until he finally arrives at certain knowledge of God. Only by following such a course would he be able to realize the highest in him and establish unity within himself.

The objective of man is not to eradicate what is in his nature or suppress what might thwart its full development, but rather to accept every aspect of it as a source of experience and knowledge, and to discipline it in a manner which will ensure his full development. In this endeavor he needs a goal whose nature itself inspires and directs such an ambition. God is the only such goal, and man by his *fiṭrah* is born to seek it.

Al-Ghazālī maintained that the suppression of the ordinary human passions may itself thwart the seeker's knowledge of God. As an illustration, the seeker cannot understand the meaning of *shawq* (desire and passion) for God without having experienced its rudiments in ordinary human desire.<sup>16</sup> Nor can the seeker understand the affinity between himself and God unless he has experienced the depth of affinity itself in human love. The reality of this affinity and the emotions associated with it cannot be communicated in words, but some terms and the individual's ordinary experiences of the deep affinities he feels with his beloved serve as leads to understand human affinity with God. All that can be said in words is that between the human creature and his Creator there is a "similarity" (*munāsabah*)

... in those attributes which God has asked us to follow and characterize ourselves with the character of godliness (*rabūbiyāh*). It is said: 'Characterize yourselves with the virtues of God.' This is done by the development of such noble qualities which are some of God's attributes, such as knowledge, generosity, good deeds, kindness, indulgence in giving what is good, mercy for others, good advice to them, guiding them in the path of truth and preventing evil, and similar virtues in the *Sharī'ah* (Islam in its scriptural form). All this brings one closer to God the Exalted.<sup>17</sup>

(16) *Ibid.*, pp. 2628 ff.

(17) *Ibid.*, p. 2601.

Concerning the question of the immortality of man, Al-Ghazālī considers death only an instant which "marks two different states of existence... Your *dunyā* (life in the world) and your *ākhirah* (life after death) signify two states of your heart. The immediate and proximate is called *dunyā* (lit., close); it is what is before death. The delayed and postponed is the *ākhirah*; it is what is after death". The difference in the two states of the "heart" is due to the difference in the conditions of its life in *dunyā* and of its life in *ākhirah*. The conditions of the former have been sufficiently discussed. What persists in the "heart" after death are, in human terms, its "knowledge and actions", i.e., the level of development which has taken place in the "heart" in its *dunyā*. "Death itself is not a state of non-being; it is only freedom from worldly occupations..."<sup>18</sup> In both states of existence, that of *dunyā* and of *ākhirah*, the common qualities are "knowledge and action". In *dunyā*, however, these are being acquired in the process of the "heart's" development in the "body". "Action" in this sense refers to the impressions and experiences left in the "heart" from the actions of the individual, in contradistinction to his activities as a "knower". It may be said to refer to those traits and attitudes which have developed in the "heart" as a result of the individual's actions in *dunyā*.

Concerning whether development in "knowledge and action" persists after death, Al-Ghazālī takes an affirmative position. In his *Alchemy*, he devotes an entire chapter to suggest that the life of the soul or "heart" after death is either a "heaven" or a "hell" according to the kind of development that has taken place in the "heart" in its *dunyā*. In the *Alchemy*, as in the *Ihyā'* in several places, Al-Ghazālī emphasizes that "heaven" and "hell" are spiritual states of the "heart". After death the individual's "sight is keen" according to the *Qur'ān*, and he is able to "see" himself without the interference of the "body". "Hell" and "heaven", according to Al-Ghazālī, refer to two states of being each of which is due to the kinds of pleasures developed in the "heart" in its life in *dunya*. If, in its *dunyā*, its predominant pleasures have been those of the appetites and "anger", then its state after death is one of torment because such pleasures can no longer be gratified. If, on the other hand, they were those of his spirit — i.e., the pleasures of seeking knowledge and virtue — then its state is one of delight and joy, for these pleasures are more easily gratified after the spirit has been freed from any pre-

(18) *Ibid.*, p. 1742.



occupation with the body. In both cases, the spirit continues to develop towards the better. The issues involved here are many and complex, but the following passage, concerning the desire of the 'arif to "meet" God, gives us a glimpse of Al-Ghazālī's thought :

...Its [the desire of the 'arif] final goal is the complete disclosure to the human individual of the Majesty of God, His Attributes, His Wisdom and His works as these are known to God Himself — and this is impossible. Such knowledge [from the human standpoint] is infinite. The human being is forever discovering that there still remain of Divine Beauty and Majesty realms which are not clear to himself. Consequently, his desire cannot settle, especially if he is one who sees that beyond his stage there are many more. Such a person is anxious at least to arrive at that stage which is the threshold (*aṣl al-wiṣāl*) to see the infinity of the final goal (*wiṣāl*). After this stage his desire becomes pleasant and devoid of the pain [of desire]. It is not inconceivable that the tenderness of illumination and thought are infinitely progressive, so that his "heaven" and joy are forever enlarged. This is possible, however, if the illumination of what has not already been illuminated in *dunya* does take place. If this were not possible, "heaven" would be a static state which does not grow. God's statement: "Their light will run before them and on their right hands : they will say : Our Lord : Perfect our light for us, and forgive us..."<sup>19</sup> may mean that this [progressive growth] is possible. God bestows upon the human being the ability to complete his light by what has not been disclosed in *dunya* in order to increase it towards perfection and clarity... And His statement : "Look on us that we may borrow from your light ! it will be said : Go back and seek for light !" <sup>20</sup> indicates that the rudiments of lights [in heaven] should be acquired in *dunya*, and then they will increase in clarity in *ākhirah*. But that a light originates in *ākhirah*, no. <sup>21</sup>

From this discussion, it becomes clear that the importance of things to human life derives from that moment in the state of the "heart" when it departs from *dunya*, i.e., from the moment of death. Al-Ghazālī divides things for this purpose into three classes.<sup>22</sup>

(19) *Qur'ān*, 67 : 8.

(20) *Ibid.*, 57 : 13. The preceding statement is : "On the day when the hypocritical men and hypocritical women will say unto those who believe : ..."

(21) *Ihyā'*, p. 2630.

(22) *Ibid.*, p. 1742.

First are the things which belong in form and essence (*sūratun wa ma'nān*) to *dunya*, and do not, therefore, serve self-development towards the knowledge and love of God. Next come the things which in essence are intended to serve self-development towards God but which may also be used to achieve other purposes. Contemplation, thought and moderation belong to this class. If an individual's primary purpose in seeking knowledge is to attain "prestige" and high renown among people, or if his chief motive in abstinence is his worry about wealth or health, then, as far as this individual is concerned, his pursuit of knowledge and his abstinence may be important to his *dunya* but they do not contribute to his pursuit of eternal happiness. Third are the things which in essence serve the pleasures of *dunya* but are also important in opening the path towards God. This class includes such things as food, raiment, shelter, marriage and everything necessary to the survival and good health of the individual, his issue and dependents.

One important principle underlies this scale of the importance of things. The relative significance of things lies primarily in the inner motive of the individual who seeks them. The pursuit of knowledge, for example, has a different influence on the development of the "heart" when sought as a means to acquire power and "prestige" than when it is sought to "know and experience" the works of God as a means to know Him and love Him. The qualities developed in the "heart" in the former case are quite different from those developed in it in the latter, and therefore, the state of the "heart" at the moment of death is different in the two cases. We have seen how the degree and kind of knowledge acquired by the individual are intimately dependent upon the kind of virtues by which he disciplines his development. In the two cases cited above, the pursuit of knowledge may at first sight be supposed to produce the same kind of development in the "heart". Actually, the degree and kind of knowledge acquired in the two cases are quite different, for the qualities produced by the difference in motives are different and may even be opposite. Accordingly, the kind of understanding attained by the individual who pursues knowledge to acquire power and "prestige" is different from that of the individual who pursues it to become closer to God.

The same principle may be understood better by considering the importance of things in the third class. Food, raiment, shelter, etc., are necessary to survival and good health, but everyone also derives pleasure from each of them. The qualities developed in the "heart", when the motive behind seeking these things is survival and health,



are different than when the immediate pleasures derived from them or the attainment of "prestige" through them are the chief motivations. These qualities would also be different for an individual who fancies that the accumulation of these things secures his "eternal survival and perfection", than for another who believes that these things are merely means to his "bodily" survival and, consequently, means to his acquisition of the "knowledge and experience" of the works of God.

The same thing may be sought by two individuals. But preoccupation with "prestige" diminishes the first seeker while the second is augmented by his desire to journey towards God. It is not the thing in itself or the pleasure derived from it that determines its influence on the "heart", it is rather the reason for which it is sought. Similarly, the seeker of "prestige" may consider the possession of certain things extremely important for his end, while the seeker of God may remain indifferent to the same things even when he is in a position to possess them.

The last Book in the *Ihyā'* is "The Book of the Remembrance of Death". The remembrance of death awakens in the individual a critical examination of his desire for "eternal and perfect survival". It is a moment which enables him to review the importance of things to himself from a perspective different from that when he is not aware of death. Death is a future moment from which he can foresee the various possibilities of self-development in his "heart", and the importance of things in each possibility. The remembrance itself is a moment in which one is able to detach oneself from the immediate importance of things and to see their influence on self-development from a life-time perspective.

Until now we have been primarily interested in the self-development of the individual, particularly the one who sets himself to know God. The rest of this chapter shall be devoted to the translation of few passages depicting Al-Ghazālī's fundamental ideas on human society as a whole.

It is significant to note that his ideas on the nature of human society are a part of his general conception of the universal order. This he expounds in "The Book of Endurance and Gratitude" in the *Ihyā'*. The principle of the unity of God dictates that human society should be conceived as a part of the unity of existence. On the other hand, society itself, viewed as a whole, should exhibit a unity within itself.

Al-Ghazālī's fundamental attitudes in conceiving human society cannot be adequately understood unless they are related to their origins

in the *Qur'ān*. The *Qur'ān*, on the one hand, inspires quests into every conceivable realm of knowledge and experience and, on the other, directs these quests towards the knowledge of God. It was sent down to Muḥammad "that they may ponder its truths, and that there may be reminded those of intelligence."<sup>23</sup> A few verses from the *Qur'ān* may suggest its inspirational influence in generating general attitudes and denoting fields of interest in understanding human society.

The difference between individual human beings and varied societies are not matters to be "tolerated", but rather are intended by God for the benefit of mankind. They express, therefore, a divine wisdom and should be so understood and appreciated.

Oh ye people, We have created you male and female and made you races and tribes, that ye may exchange knowledge of one another; verily the most noble of you in Allah's eyes is the most pious; verily Allah is knowing, well-informed.<sup>24</sup>

There is no people to whom God has not sent some kind of guidance. The differences in the ways of "worship" between peoples are not matters to be resolved by human beings. The only and final judge is God Himself.

For each people We have appointed a pious rite which they follow; let them therefore not dispute the matter with thee, but bid them to thy Lord; verily thou art upon guidance straight. If they dispute with thee, say: "Allah knoweth well what ye do." Allah will judge between you on the day of resurrection in regard to that in which ye have been differing.<sup>25</sup>

History and the various ways of life in the world are indispensable sources to distinguish and understand the principles of the best life.

Already, before your time, have precedents been made. Traverse the earth then, and see what hath been the end of those who falsify the signs of God.<sup>26</sup>

The glories and defeats of the various peoples serve the same purpose. If a wound hath befallen you, a wound like it hath already befallen others. These are the days which We cause to alternate amongst peoples, in order that Allah may know those who have

(23) *Qur'ān* 38 : 28.

(24) *Ibid.*, 49 : 13.

(25) *Ibid.*, 22 : 66-68.

(26) *Ibid.*, 3 : 131.



believed, and may choose witnesses from amongst you; Allah loveth not the wrong-doers. And that Allah may purge those who have believed, and sift out the unbelievers.<sup>27</sup>

Have they not traveled about in the earth so as to have hearts to understand with and ears to hear with? For it is not the eyes which are blind, but blind are the hearts which are in the breasts.<sup>28</sup>

The first principle to keep in mind in understanding human society is that nothing in it is "created" by man, and that God is its real and only Ruler. Society should be understood, therefore, from the standpoint of God. God does not rule it, however, through a particular human agency. We have already seen how He rules the individual through His "servants" — which include the various aspects of human nature itself. In a similar manner, God rules human society through his "servants" — which include the human race itself. In the case of the individual, we have seen how his understanding governs the degree of his "freedom" in action. Similarly in human society, human understanding is one of the conditions which governs the degree of its "freedom" in its development and change.

The Muslim social thinker is an investigator whose chief purpose is to understand how God's wisdom is manifested in the life of mankind as a whole and God's method of ruling human society. For this purpose he investigates all the "servants" of God in the life of society. Human intelligence and whatever is related to it in the form of ideas, principles of behavior, institutions, etc., are some of these "servants". The entire history of the human race, the successes and failures of its various peoples, the differences between individuals, the differences in the ways of life of the various peoples of the world, and any matter related to human life, are all indispensable elements in understanding the meaning of God's governing of mankind and the unity of the human race under His government. In the passages which follow below, we shall see how geography and economic interdependence "serve" in uniting mankind.

These investigations may lead to an understanding of the principles which God revealed to Muhammad as the principles best able to secure and preserve the welfare of mankind. Human understanding of these principles, in accordance with the above requirements, itself becomes

(27) *Ibid.*, 3 : 134, 135.

(28) *Ibid.*, 22 : 45.

one of the "conditions" in the life of society, *i.e.*, one of the immediate "servants" of God in ruling it.

The Muslim social thinker cannot "construct" a utopian image of human society as is done in the Western tradition in "political theory". Such an attempt would disregard the Rule of God. He is supposed only to investigate the forces which govern human society and, from such investigation, arrive at a knowledge of the wisdom incorporated in the principles of the *Qur'ān*. His next task is to translate these principles into workable norms for society by "deduction". Nor can a Muslim social thinker limit his interests to a "polis", an "empire", or a "nation-state", for God's government cannot be so limited. God, in a real sense, rules all and the Muslim thinker and his own community are just parts of the whole. But God's government is not a "Kingdom of God" to come where everyone follows the same way of life. It has always existed and will continue to exist as long as God wishes. But some societies have received better guidance than others. The criterion of which principles guide better is to be found in history and differences between peoples.

The study of every 'umma<sup>29</sup> yields knowledge which is essential to know God and to understand the wisdom of the *Qur'ān*. But the Rule of God generates a feeling of true belongingness to all mankind. The expression, "Oh ye people" (*al-nāṣ*), in the first verse quoted above, appears very frequently in the *Qur'ān*, and addresses all the human race. In a similar manner, the Muslim social thinker addresses himself not to his own particular community but to the whole human race, for although he is aware of the variety of communities and the differences between them, he is more aware of the real government of God over all. Mankind is united under the government of God without being "organized" into a human institution of "unity". No human institution may claim the authority to "unite" mankind. It is worthwhile to remember in this context the extremely "individualistic" philosophy of Islam discussed in the previous chapters. The individual alone is responsible for his self-development, and his responsibility is immediate to God. Human society as a whole is the setting, so to speak, of his self-development, but it cannot be the dictator of it. The degree of his subjection to it depends upon the degree of his understanding. His "freedom" is not secured by society but by the degree of his under-

(29) *Infra*, pp. 193-4.



standing. Some societies are better for the development of his understanding than others, but all human society and its history are important in his self-development. A "free" individual is not the product of a specific society. Society is only one of the "conditions", one of the "servants" of God, in his self-development. A "free" individual is the product of his own understanding.

This basic and uncompromising "self-government" of the individual, on the one hand, and the real rule of God over human society without its being delegated to any specific human agency, on the other, are the most fundamental characteristics of Islam. The concept of *jihād* is subordinate to these, for human beings cannot assume the power to rule others. Human beings as groups can only be "servants" of God. Whether their "service" is "good" or "bad" depends upon the point of view. But from the viewpoint of God, all are necessary and therefore "good". It is obvious that these principles involve very serious issues which cannot be fully discussed here.

After these digressions, we return to Al-Ghazālī, but keeping in mind that the principles just stated dominated his thought.

The most visible "servant" in the unity of mankind is that no geographic region was created to be economically self-sufficient. The fact that no region possesses all the "conditions" necessary for the growth of all the food products and other needs of man is indicative of a divine wisdom which makes all peoples need one another. This inescapable economic interdependence between the various peoples of the world — the fact that most of them pursue the goals developed to satisfy their appetites, "anger" and desire for "lordship", and that they are driven by their desire for "eternal and perfect survival" to accumulate what they fancy will secure such survival — all these are some of the "servants" of God which make the unity of mankind inevitable.

Know that these foods (needed by man) do not all exist in every place. Each kind of food requires peculiar conditions for it to exist, and may, therefore, be found in some places and not in others. The human race is scattered over the whole face of the earth, and many foods may be far from many of them or even separated from them by oceans or deserts. Consider, then, how God has subjected the merchants and tyrannized them by their extreme love of wealth and their lust for profit — although in most cases wealth is of little value to their own person. But

nevertheless they endure extreme hardships in seeking profit; they ride dangers, and belittle life itself in riding overseas. They transport the foods and all the various needs of human beings from the farthest East to the farthest West — all this trouble is for you.

Consider how God has taught them how to make ships and how to use them. Consider how He has created the animals, and subjected some for riding and some for bearing burdens on land. Consider how the camels were created, how the horse was endowed with great speed, how the donkey was made to endure fatigue, or how camels cross the deserts and leave stations behind them under heavy burdens while they are hungry and thirsty. Consider how God enables the merchants to move by means of ships and animals on sea and on land in order to bring to you your foods and other needs.

Then think for a while what conditions are necessary for these various animals to live, and what they need in the way of tools and food. Consider what ships need. God has created all these in sufficient quantities, and more. And to count His bounties is not possible, for this will lead to matters which defy counting...<sup>30</sup>

Al-Ghazālī then considers the labor which goes into the preparation of one single food product, in order to illustrate the necessity of interdependence among all human beings and the unity of purpose in all human crafts and professions. He considers in detail the case of one loaf of bread and what kinds of labor are needed from the moment the grain is sown until it is ready to eat.

Imagine for a while all the number of the kinds of labor which we have mentioned and those we did not, the number of persons who perform them and the number of tools needed, and what these tools need of iron, wood, stone and other materials. Then consider the labor of the various craftsmen in making the tools for ploughing, grinding, baking, such as the carpenter, the blacksmith and others. Then consider the needs of the blacksmith for iron, lead and copper. Then consider how God has created the mountains the rocks and the metals, and how He has divided land into continents, different, but in proximity to one another.

(30) *Ihyā'*, p. 2274.



If you investigate, you will know that one loaf of bread does not become round and ready for you to eat, you helpless creature, unless more than a thousand laborers have engaged themselves in its production.

But the loaf of bread is not merely a human product. Its production presupposes and expresses the unity of all existence. The following passage follows immediately :

Start with the angelic powers<sup>31</sup> which drive the clouds to pour rain, and consider the rest of these forces until the chain ends up with the labor of man. When the loaf has become round, it has been wrought by nearly seven thousand kinds of "laborers", each one performing a fundamental (*aṣl*) job of the fundamental activities by which the welfare of mankind is accomplished...

But these conditions — the interdependency among the forces in the universe and the interdependency among human beings — are not sufficient to secure the needs of mankind :

Know that all these [human] laborers who prepare the foods and other needs, if their opinions were divergent, and if their temperaments were as repelling to one another as the temperaments of the brutes, then they would live as isolated individuals away from one another, and none would benefit by the labor of the others. Nay, they would be like the brutes, not capable of settling in one place and not bound by one objective. Then consider how God has attuned their hearts together and tyrannized them by their [need for] fellowship (*uns*) and love. "If thou hadst expended all that is in the earth thou wouldst not have knit their hearts together, but Allah hath knit them." For the sake of fellowship and exchange of knowledge, men have aggregated together and become bound to one another. They built cities and countries. They arranged their dwellings and houses close to one another. They laid down market places, inns and other innumerable things.

This love, however, is extinguished by some interests they all seek and compete for, for in the nature of man there is, besides love, hate, envy and competition. These qualities breed quarrelling

(31) In this as in other contexts, it is not clear what Al-Ghazālī means by "angelic" powers. We have seen that in *khawāṣṣir* he considers them as "good impulses". Here they may be the good "invisible" laws of nature.

and antagonisms. Now consider how God has enabled some to rule, supplied them with the tools, and means [of ruling], and made their subjects fear them and obey them, willingly or unwillingly. Consider how He has guided the rulers in the direction of the welfare of their country, so that they administer the various parts as though they were the parts of one person, all of them sharing in one end, and each benefiting by the others. For this purpose the rulers have (created) the heads of agencies, the judges, the prisons, the chiefs of market places, and have demanded from all people obedience to justice. In this manner they have obligated people to assist each other and cooperate. Each person benefits from every other, because of the interdependence, the associations and the organization of all under the administration of one ruler and his assistants, in the same manner that all the members of the body cooperate and benefit one another.<sup>32</sup>

The following short passage expresses the movement in the process of divine guidance to the best life :

Government educates the laborers; the prophets educate the '*ulamā*', the learned men, who are the heirs of the prophets; the '*ulamā*' educate the rulers; and the angels educate the prophets, until this [order] ends up with the *ḥaḍrah rabūḥiyah* (Divine Kingdom), which is the source of every order, the origin of every good and beauty, and the fount where every discipline and interdependence is born.<sup>33</sup>

In the movement of history, every "set of beliefs" or, to use the modern term, "ideology" — has its fixed period and fulfills a specific purpose in the history of mankind.

Every '*ummah*' hath its fixed period.<sup>34</sup>

Fortunately Al-Ghazālī gives us a list of the various meanings which the term "*ummah*" indicates. In modern times this term is often, but erroneously, used to translate the term "nation", as this term is understood in the Western tradition. '*Ummah*', however, as the following passage indicates, stands for "a way of life".

(32) *Ibid.*, pp. 2276-7.

(33) *Ibid.*, p. 2277.

(34) *Qur'ān* 7 : 32.



The term *'ummah* has eight meanings. [First], it means a "group", such as in God's statement : "... he found there a group' of people, watering..."<sup>35</sup> [Second,] "the followers of a prophet' (i.e., the followers of a whole way of life), as when you say : "I am from the *'ummah* of Muḥammad", God's praise and peace be upon him. [Third,] "an individual who embodies all the good and becomes a model for others", such as in God's statement : "Verily Abraham was an *'ummah*, devout towards Allah."<sup>36</sup> [Fourth,] "*'ummah*" also means "a religion", such as in His statement : "... we found our fathers follow a common religion..."<sup>37</sup> [Fifth,] "*'ummah*" also means Time, or a specific period, such as in His statement : "... until a reckoned *'ummah*",<sup>38</sup> and in : "... for he recollected himself after some *'ummah*."<sup>39</sup> [Sixth,] "*'ummah*" also means "posture", as when it is said : "so-and-so has a beautiful *'ummah* — i. e., posture." [Seventh,] "*'ummah*" is an individual who has a unique religion which no one else shares. The Prophet — God's prayer and peace be upon him — said : "Zaid b. 'Amr b. Nufail shall be resurrected as one *'ummah* by himself." And [Eighth,] "*'ummah*" means "the mother" (*'umm*)<sup>40</sup>.

(35) *Ibid.*, 28 : 23.

(36) *Ibid.*, 16 : 120.

(37) *Ibid.*, XLIII : 22.

(38) *Ibid.*, 11 : 8.

(39) *Ibid.*, 12 : 45.

(40) *Ihyā'*, p. 530.

## Appendix

### THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN SOCIETY

A section in

"The Book of the Blameworthiness of the World"

from the *Ihyā'* pp. 1748-1758, under the title:

"The Reality of the Present World (Dunyā) and the  
Worldly Occupations Which Have Engaged the Ambitions  
of Men and Made Them Forget Themselves, their  
Creator, their Beginning and their Final End'.

By Al-Ghazali



THE REALITY OF THE PRESENT WORLD (DUNYA)  
AND THE WORLDLY OCCUPATIONS WHICH HAVE ENGAGED  
THE AMBITIONS OF MEN AND MADE THEM FORGET  
THEMSELVES, THEIR CREATOR, THEIR BEGINNING  
AND THEIR FINAL END

Know that the term *Dunyā* (the present world) stands for : 1748  
certain concrete things, the pleasure which man derives from  
them, and the improvements he adds to them (in their state of  
nature) for his benefit. These are three matters which the term  
*Dunyā* signifies, and it is a mistake to suppose — as is sometimes  
done — that it stands for only one of them.

The concrete things which *Dunyā* signifies are this earth and  
all that is on it. God the Exalted said, "Verily, We have appointed  
what is on the earth as an adornment for it, in order that We may  
try them (the human beings) which of them is best in deed."\* The  
Earth is a bed for human beings, a cradle, a domicile and an abode,  
and what is on it makes their raiment, food, drink and mates.

What is on the earth is divided into three classes : minerals,  
plants and animals. Man seeks plants for nourishment and  
medicine; metals, such as copper and lead, for tools and utensils;  
gold and silver for money and other purposes. Animals are either  
human beings or domestic animals; the latter are sought for  
their meat to eat, their backs to ride, or for their ornamental  
values. Man may seek to possess the bodies of other human  
beings for their services and exploitation, such as boys; or for  
their enjoyment, such as wives and slave girls. Man also seeks  
the hearts of other human beings in order to possess them by  
planting in their hearts (the impression of his own grandeur and  
respect due to himself. This is what is meant by "prestige", for  
the meaning of "prestige" is the possession of the hearts of human  
beings.

Then these are the concrete things which the term *Dunyā*  
signifies. God has mentioned them all in : "Made attractive to

\* *Qur'ān*, 18 : 6.



human beings is the love of pleasures, wives and children", referring to other human beings, "and hoarded hoards of gold and silver", referring to jewelry, metals, and precious stones, "and excellent horses, cattle", referring to domestic animals, "and land", referring to plants and crops.\*

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These things are the concrete things of *Dunyā* and the individual has two relations with them. The first is with his "heart", and it is its love of them, the pleasure it experiences from them, and its preoccupation with them. In this relation the heart may become like a slave or like the lover who is oblivious of everything. All those qualities of the "heart" which are associated with worldly ambitions are included under this relationship; such qualities as : arrogance, miserliness, envy, hypocrisy, desire for recognition, suspicion, obsequiousness, the love of worldly increase (in wealth and one's group), love of praise and boastfulness. These qualities indicate the intangible aspects of *Dunyā*. The tangible are those we have mentioned above. The second relationship of man to *Dunyā* is with his body. This relationship is manifested in man's labor to improve the tangible things and make them fit his pleasures and the pleasures of others. Under this relationship all the crafts and professions which engage human beings are included.

People have forgotten themselves, their Final End and their obligations in this world as a result of the above two relationships, namely, the relationship of the heart with love, and that of the body with labor. But if a person knew himself, knew his Master and knew the wisdom in *Dunyā* and the secret in it, he would then realize that the above things which we have termed *Dunyā* were created only to feed the mount upon which man travels toward God the Exalted. I mean by this mount "the body", for the body cannot survive without food, drink, clothing and shelter, in the same way that a camel cannot survive on its pilgrimage except by grain, water and cover.

The example of the individual in "this world" in forgetting himself and his objective is similar to that of the pilgrim who stops at one of the stations to Mecca, and feeds his camel, takes care of it, cleans it, covers it with a variety of colorful clothes,

\* *Qur'ān*, 3 : 14.

supplies it with different types of grass, and cools its drinking water with ice. While this person is so fully preoccupied, the caravan leaves him behind, he forgets his pilgrimage, the departure of the caravan and even his isolation in the desert to become a prey for wild beasts, both he and his camel. The wise pilgrim does not give his camel more attention than what is needed, for his heart is set on the Ka'ba and the pilgrimage.

The latter is the case of the wise man in his journey towards the Next Life; he attends to the nurture of his body only to the extent that necessity demands. The stomach is what keeps people away from God more than anything else. Food is absolutely necessary; shelter and clothing are essential though not as necessary. If men realize why they need these things, they become contented, and worldly engagements will not fully preoccupy them. Worldly things submerge men because of their ignorance of the true importance of life in this world, and because of the immediate pleasures they derive from things. And as a result of their ignorance and oversight, worldly engagements gradually 1750 enslave them. Worldly engagements are creative of one another and spread out progressively and indefinitely. Men as a result lose themselves in the medley of work and forget their true purposes.

Presently we shall discuss worldly engagements in detail, how the need has arisen for all of them, and how men have failed to see the ends which these engagements were supposed to serve, in order to make clear to you how worldly affairs have turned men's faces from God the Exalted, and made them uncritical of the results of their action. We say :

Worldly engagements are all the crafts, industries and all the activities which you see human beings preoccupied with. All the variety in human activities is caused by three basic necessities : food, shelter and raiment. Food for nourishment and survival; clothing for protection against heat and cold; and shelter from heat and cold as well as against dangers to the security of the family and its possessions. God did not create man in a manner whereby the objects of his food, shelter and clothing were ready for his use (in their state of nature) so that he may be relieved from making them, although God did create animals capable of using such things readily. Animals feed on plants without cooking them. Heat and cold do not harm their bodies. They are not in need



of buildings, and are contented with open space. Their hair and skin are their clothing.

Man is not like animals in these respects. His (three) basic needs demanded the invention of five industries, which are the mother industries of all others and the origins of all other worldly engagements. The five are farming, herding, hunting, weaving and masonry. Masonry is for man's shelter; weaving and its related arts, such as spinning and tailoring, for his clothing; and farming for his food. By herding he keeps domestic animals and horses which he uses also for food and for riding. By hunting we mean the acquisition of whatever God has created as prey, metals, grasses, or wood. The farmer produces plants; the shepherd keeps animals in order to use them and use their products. The hunter acquires whatever grows or exists without the labor of others, and he prospects for the minerals created in the earth which are not yet mined or improved upon by the labor of others. This is what we mean by hunting. Several crafts and labors (connected with it) are included under the term "hunting".

These occupations such as weaving, farming, building and hunting require tools and machines which are made either of plants; *i.e.*, wood, or of metals such as iron and lead, or of animal skins. Thus the need for new craftsmen arises: carpenters, smiths and tanners who are the makers of tools. We mean by the carpenter any craftsman who works in wood; by the smith anyone who works with iron or other finished metals, such as copper, bronze, or other metals. Our purpose here is to classify crafts into categories, for individual crafts are too many. By the tanner we mean anyone who works with the skins of animals or their parts. These crafts are the mothers of industries.

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Man was, on the other hand, created that he may not live alone, but forced to flock together with others of his kind for two reasons. First, his desire for issue by which the human species is preserved. This is not possible without the association of the male and the female and their companionship. Second, his need for cooperation in the preparation of food and clothing. Cooperation is also required in the education of children, for children are an inevitable result of aggregation. One individual cannot take care of the children and also provide the means of living. But cooperation within one household, with the wife and children, is not

sufficient (for survival). It is not possible to maintain a household unless a large number of families live together, so that different persons may undertake different needed crafts. How can a head of a family alone undertake farming while he is in need of its tools? These tools require the smith and the carpenter, and food requires the miller and the baker. Or, how can a man alone prepare clothes, if he must guard his cotton, as well as obtain the tools of weaving, tailoring and various other necessities? For these reasons the individual could not survive alone. Hence the necessity for aggregation with others.

But if men lived together in the open, they would be harmed by the heat, the cold, the rain and thieves. They, therefore, became in need of strong dwellings to house the individual families and the tools and furniture that each family possessed. Houses protect from heat, cold and rain; and protect against the possible encroachment of neighbors who steal or cause other damage. These houses, on the other hand, may be attacked by a band of outsiders. The people of the houses, therefore, are in need of mutual assistance and cooperation to ensure their safety within a wall which would surround all the houses. Cities (*bilād*) emerge as a result of these necessities.

But whenever people live in houses and cities and carry out transactions between one another, frictions are bound to occur. This is partly because human association entails authoritative relationships. Guardianships (*wilāyāt*), such as that of the husband over the wife, or of the parents over their children, for the latter are weak and need support, become necessary. Whenever authority is exercised over any rational human being, it generates conflict. This is unlike authority exercised over animals, for animals do not possess the power to rebel, even when they are unjustly treated. The wife will clash with the husband, and the child with the parents. These are conflicts within the household. But within the city, conflict arises between the members in their business transactions for their respective needs. If they are left to themselves, they will fight and extinguish one another. This is also true in the case of the shepherds and farmers, both of whom seek pasture, land and water, and these things may not be sufficient for the wants of them all. Therefore, conflict among them too, is unavoidable.

Some persons (in the city) may be disabled for farming or



craftsmanship due to blindness, sickness, old age, or due to a variety of accidents. If such persons were left to themselves, they would perish. If their support is made the responsibility of all others, the latter would be indifferent. If one individual was designated for this function without any personal incentive, he would not accept the task.

Therefore, new professions became inevitable as a result of the above discords which were created by and accidental to gregation.

One of these professions is surveying, by which land is measured 1752 in order that it may be divided justly among men. Another is military art in order to defend the city with the sword and repel thieves. Still another is adjudication, to resolve conflicts. From the need for adjudication arises the need for law, which is the science of the rules by which people should be controlled and coerced to observe the limits (*ḥudūd*) it prescribes in order to minimize disputes. Law is the knowledge of the "limits" which God the Exalted has set down for associations and transactions and for the right conditions (under which they should be carried out).

These three functions are political matters which are incapable. Only experts with special qualifications can discharge them. Such qualifications are learning, discretion and divine guidance (*hidāyah*). Men who perform these functions would have no time left for other occupations. On one hand, they need to live, and on the other, the people of the city need their services. For if, for example, all the people of the city became engaged in war with their enemies, crafts would cease. Or, if the military men engaged themselves in occupations for their livelihood, then the cities would be left unprotected; and the inhabitants themselves would become unwieldy. Hence, necessity demanded that the property (land) without a (private) owner should be spent for the support of soldiers. If such property did not exist, then the army should derive their means of livelihood from the booty, if the war was with heathens. But if the war was with a people of religion and piety, the soldiers should be contented with the little which comes from public revenues.

If expansion becomes desirable, then the people themselves are bound to aid the military from their private possessions in order to be protected. Taxation (*kharāj*) becomes necessary.

As a result of the need for taxation, new occupations become necessary. Now it will be necessary to have persons who would assess the amounts of axes on the farms and real-estates justly, these are the governors (*‘ummāl*); and persons who would collect the taxes with consideration and leniency, these are the tax-collectors (*ḡubāt*); and persons who would keep the collected taxes until they are needed to remunerate the soldiers, these are the treasurers (*khuzzān*), and persons who would then apportion these revenues among the soldiers justly, these are allotters (*al-fāriḡ li al-‘asāker*) for the army.

If these various functions above were the responsibilities of many persons without any power to bind those persons together, order would disintegrate. Hence, a monarch (*malik*) becomes indispensable. He should be a prince who commands obedience and who appoints for each office a person fitted for it. This king should observe equity and justice in levying taxes or in spending them, in using the army for war, in distributing arms among the soldiers, in deciding which lands war should be waged upon, in the appointment of the amir, the general over each group among the soldiers, and in the rest of the functions of kingship.

Now that there are men of arms and a king who watches them with vigilance and organizes them, the need for writers (clerks), treasurers, accountants, tax collectors and governors arises. These persons also require means of living. But they cannot earn from private occupations, hence the need for the "branch" sources of revenue (*māl al-far‘*) in addition to the "original" sources (*māl al-aṣl*) of revenue; these are called the "branch" taxes (*kharāj al-far‘*).

At this stage (in the development of society) the people will be made up of three classes : first, the farmers, herders and craftsmen; 1753 second, the soldiers who are the defenders of society with their swords; and third, those who are the intermediary agents between these two classes in collecting taxes and allocating revenues. The last group are the governors, the tax-collectors and their like.

Now, consider how this whole matter started with the basic necessity for food, raiment and shelter; and into what it has developed. Such is the nature of worldly affairs : as one door opens, others are bound to open as a consequence, and so on indefinitely, as if the "present world" (*dunyā*) were a pit without



a bottom; and he who falls to one level inside it drops from there to another and again another continuously.

So far we have been speaking of crafts and skills. But these are in want of means of exchange (wealth) and tools. "Wealth" signifies the concrete things of the earth and whatever is on it that is useful. The most useful are the foods; next are the places in which man finds shelter. These are either dwellings or places where he pursues his occupation, such as shops, market places and farms. Next in usefulness are clothing, furniture and tools for the household, and the tools for the making of the tools. Some animals may be included under "tools"; such as the dog for hunting, cattle for ploughing and horses for riding in war.

Exchange originates in the following manner: the farmer may live in a village where there are no tools for farming; or the smith and the carpenter may live in a village where cultivation is not possible. Of necessity, the farmer needs these craftsmen, and they in turn need him. Every one among these persons has to offer what he produces to the others in return for what he himself needs from them. Such a transaction is done through barter.

But if the carpenter, for example, asks for food from the farmer in exchange for tools, it may happen that the farmer is not at that instance in need of the carpenter's tools and may not trade with the latter. In the same way, the farmer may need to barter food for tools with the carpenter who may, at that time, possess sufficient quantities of food and not be in urgent need for the farmer's products. In such instances the satisfaction of needs may be jeopardized.

Therefore, human beings were compelled to build up shops which could contain all the products of every craft. The owner stores these things in order to supply the people who want them. People are also obliged to build warehouses where farmers may display their products. The owner buys their products and stores them in order to supply those who want food. Market-places and storehouses originate in a similar manner. The farmer brings his crop (to the city), and if he does not find a consumer, sells it at a lower price to a middle-man who stores it awaiting those who will need it and anticipating a profit. This is the pattern in handling all the needs and objects of wealth.

For these reasons travel back and forth (*taraddud*) between

villages and cities becomes inevitable. Some journey between them buying food products from villages and tools from cities making their living from this activity. All the wants of human beings are thus accommodated through these persons, for it may happen that not every city has every tool nor every village every food product. Every section in society requires all the rest; transportation of goods becomes essential, and merchants whose function is this transportation become necessary. The motive of merchants is unquestionably their desire to accumulate wealth. They toil unceasingly all day and night in travel in order to satisfy the wants <sup>1754</sup> of others. The reward of these merchants in all this is the heaping up of riches which others, either a bandit or an unjust sultan, shall no doubt enjoy. But God has made in their oversight and ingorance the preservation of society and the welfare of mankind.

Actually all worldly affairs are preserved by the oversight and petty ambitions of men. If men were wise and their ambitions high, they would abstain from worldly endeavors. But if they did abstain, the means of human living would come to an end; and if these come to an end, people would perish, and all the pious would perish with them.

All the transportable goods cannot be borne by man himself. He needs animals to carry them. The owner of the goods may not possess such animals. A transaction, called "hire", between him and another who owns animals takes place. "Hiring" arises as a new means of living.

As a result of exchange, money becomes necessary, for he who wants to buy food with a garment has no way of knowing the value equivalent in food. Transactions involve different kinds of commodities. A garment is sold for food, or an animal for a garment. These are things which cannot be compared. An arbiter who would rule between the two transactions justly becomes necessary — one who would match a given commodity with another. This arbiter should be a tangible possession and should be of long endurance, for the need for it is permanent. The most lasting of possessions are metals; hence money was made of gold, silver and copper. Now it becomes necessary to mint, engrave and rate money; thus mint houses and houses of exchange become necessary.

Needs and occupations are creative of one another in such a



manner that they have developed to what you now see.

These are the engagements of mankind, and they are their means of living. None of these human occupations could be performed, however, without some learning and some exertion in the beginning. Yet there may be a person who has neglected this in his youth and did not learn, or he may have been prevented by some reason. Such a person remains unable to earn, for want of skill, and is bound to live on what others produce. Two degraded professions ensue: that of thieves and that of parasites. What is common to both professions is living on the fruits of others' labor.

People become cautious of thieves and parasites and protect their possessions from them. The latter then have to engage their wits in devising tricks and plans. Some thieves acquire power and strength by taking in assistants. They combine their forces and become numerous enough for highway robbery, like the Bedouins and Kurds. The weak among thieves resort to tricks, either by digging into a house or climbing into it when it is left unguarded. Others become pick-pockets or cut-purses or resort to other types of theft, each of which is the result of the kind of mind which produces it.

But the parasite is told, if he asks others for anything they have themselves earned: "Exert yourself and work like others do; what benefit do you get out of idleness?" He is not justified to be an object of charity. He, therefore, has to resort to trickery in order to extract wealth, and he finds disability a good excuse for his idleness. This disability may be self-inflicted and thus real. Some actually blind themselves and their children in order to be excused through blindness and hence given aid. Others pretend blindness, paralysis, insanity, or some other sickness; and they exhibit these pretensions with all kinds of tricks, explaining that their particular tragedy struck them without their deserving it — a good reason for the charity of others.

Others resort to some recitations or performances which would arouse the people's wonder and cause their hearts to relax while watching these things. The onlookers, while still under the spell of amazement, contribute little sums. They may regret this giving after their wonder is gone, but then regret is of no avail. The performers, in order to attract the people, mimic, imitate, clown, or stage other acts which cause laughing. These acts may be

accompanied by strange poems or rhyming prose sung with a beautiful voice. Poetry, being rhythmical, is more effective on the self, particularly when it appeals to some religious sentiments, such as the excellences of the Companions of the Prophet, or the memorable actions of his descendants. Performers may also resort to what arouses the sensuous desires of pleasure seekers, such as drummers in the market-place.

Some among the parasitic class make business deals with the people by what seems to be a just barter while actually it is not. They sell magical ointments or drugs (*hastif*). They allege these things to be medicines, thus deceiving the minors and the ignorant. The fortune tellers among the astrologers fall under this species. Preachers and orators also belong to this class if their objective is not to spread knowledge, but merely to enchant the hearts of the multitude and then take their money with all sorts of tricks, which sorts exceed one or two thousand ways. All these varieties of deceitful tricks were discovered through intellectual exertion as means of living.

These are the activities and pursuits to which human beings devote themselves and into which they were plunged as a result of their basic need for food and cover. In the process they have forgotten themselves and their real objective; they went astray and missed the truth. After their minds were corrupted by the rush of worldly concerns, some false fancies entered their weak minds. As a result, they broke up into a variety of outlooks, and their ideas differed in many respects.

Some were dominated by ignorance and oversight and became unable to see any significance in their lives. These said "that life is merely to spend some numbered days in this world. Therefore, we shall strive to earn our food, eat to become able to earn again, then earn in order to eat." They eat to earn, and earn to eat. This is the reasoning of farmers and craftsmen, and of those who are denied the pleasures of this world or the delights of insight in religion. They toil during the day in order to eat at night, and eat at night in order to toil during the day. This life is like a journey which ends only by death.

Another group supposed that the Chief End of man is not to exert oneself in laboring, nor does it lie in avoiding indulgence in "this world". Their supreme bliss is in the gratification of their



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worldly desires, *i.e.* their stomach and sexual lusts. These men have forgotten their "selves" and canalized their ambitions in the pursuit of women and the savoring of delicious foods— and they eat like animals. They believe that they would achieve the height of bliss through the attainment of these things. These pursuits divert them from God and the Next Life.

Another group thought that the Chief End is in great wealth and in independence from others through the possession of many treasures. They work night and day in the heaping up of riches. They expend themselves in travel all night and day, alternating between one laborious task and another; their sole aim is to earn and multiply their riches. Lest their wealth be reduced, they grudge it to themselves and do not eat more than what is essential. This remains their pleasure and their mode of living until death overcomes them. Their wealth is hoarded underground until one who consumes it on food and pleasures comes into possession of it. To the accumulator, wealth was toil and anxiety; to the spender, enjoyment. Those who still lay up riches see such examples and yet do not learn from them.

Another group thought that the Chief End is in the extension of personal reputation, the flow of others' tongues in gratitude, and their praises of his beneficence and deeds. Such persons labor in earning their living, but are miserly to themselves in food and drink, and spend their substance on beautiful clothes and rare horses. They decorate the gates of their houses and everything that could be observed by outsiders, so that it may be said: "He is prosperous and possesses great wealth." Such men deem such reputation to be happiness. The goal of their ambition, day and night, is to capture the admiration of others.

Another group supposed that the Chief End is in the extension of their dominion and prestige, whereby other men shall be driven to exalt and magnify them. The goal of their ambition is to draw people to their obedience. For this purpose they seek positions of authority and sultanic offices, so that their authority will be exercised over others. They believe that in the extension of their personal authority and in the seeking of their favors by those subject to them, they achieve the height of happiness. This is their Chief End. The love of authority is the most powerful urge among those who are negligent of themselves and of God.

The preoccupation of these is their love of humiliating others to them — when humility is justly due only to God, His worship, the remembrance of the Next Life, and the Ultimate End of human beings.

Besides these varieties of people there are others. It would take too long to mention them all. They exceed a few over seventy, all of whom have gone astray or have caused others to stray from the right path. All these varieties, however, were gradually driven to strive for such ends as a consequence of their basic need for food, raiment and shelter. They have forgotten what these three concerns were intended for and how much was sufficient of each. These first needs have eventually multiplied into unending wants which have progressively led men to pitfalls from which it was not possible for them to come out of.

But he who knows the true value of the means of living and <sup>1757</sup> occupations, and knows what they are intended for, will not involve himself in a job, a craft, or an occupation without realizing its real objective and his benefit and personal gain from it; or, without bearing in mind that the primary purpose of worldly occupations is the nurturing of his body by food and clothing that he may not perish. He would also realize that if he followed a balanced course of self-examination, worldly engagements would not enslave him. His heart would be left free, dominated by the needs of the Next Life, and his ambitions spent preparing for it. But if he seeks more worldly goods than is necessary, his labor will increase and each engagement will beget another and so on indefinitely. His concerns correspondingly would branch out. And he whose concerns are spread into the valleys of "this world" God does not mind in which of these valleys He terminates his life. This is the terminal end of anyone absorbed in worldly concerns.

Some people saw this danger and consequently abstained from worldly endeavors. But Satan, out of spite, did not spare them his intrigues and led them astray even in their abstinence. Hence the variety among these also.

One group thought that life in "this world" is one of suffering and anguish, and that happiness is attained only after death, and by anyone, whether he has been a worshipper or not. This group, therefore, saw fit to kill themselves in order to be relieved



from the inescapable torments of "this world". Some groups among Hindu hermits abide by this doctrine; they throw themselves in fire and end their lives believing that death is their salvation from the pains of "this world".

Another group believed that putting an end to life did not save, but that what was essential to salvation was the eradication of the "human" qualities and their total uprooting from the soul. In other words, happiness lay in the complete suppression of appetites and passions. These people, therefore, devoted themselves to ascetic discipline. They deprived their bodies with such rigor that some perished as a result; others ruined their minds and became insane; others fell sick and the path to worship thus became closed to them. But others still failed in their attempt to eradicate their human qualities and concluded that what the (divine) Law demanded was impossible of realization and that, therefore, that Law was a sham without any roots in truth.

It seemed to another group that all this tedious worship was directed entirely to please God; and that God the Exalted was not in need of any worship from His creatures. The disobedience of the sinful does not decrease Him, nor does the worship of the obedient add to Him. The followers of this doctrine returned to the demands of their appetites; they became antinomians and abandoned all laws and rules of conduct. They claimed that such a mode of living was a demonstration of the purity of their monotheism, for God could not be in need of the worship of His creatures.

Another group believed that the intention of the acts of worship was a spiritual warfare through which the individual arrived at a direct apprehension of God. After this was achieved, the performance of the means (the act of worship) was no longer necessary. Such individuals, therefore, abandoned spiritual discipline and worship and claimed that their rank had been elevated, through the direct knowledge of God, beyond the observance of religious obligations (*takālif*). They scorned these obligations and alleged that they were prescribed for the common people only.

There are other false doctrines which are too many to mention. They slightly exceed seventy schools of thought.

Only one of these schools is safe. It is that one which follows

the Messenger of God and his Companions. This school does not teach the complete abandonment of "this world", nor the eradication of appetites. The follower takes from "this world" what is sufficient for provision. He suppresses those appetites that violate the Law (*shar'*) and reason. He does not yield to every desire, nor abandon every desire, but follows what is just. He does not abjure everything in "this world" nor seek everything. But he knows what is intended by everything created on this earth. He saves as much as is necessary. He takes of food what makes his body fit for worship; of shelter what protects him from thieves and the elements; and of clothing what protects him from heat and cold.

In this way his "heart" becomes free, though he nurtures his body. He sets himself towards God as the essence of his ambition. He occupies himself with the remembrance of God and with contemplation all his life. He always adheres to the policy of guiding his appetites and watching over them, that he may not step over the limits of piety and goodness.

This good life is not known except by following the example of the Saved Group, who are the Companions. When the Prophet, peace be on him, said, "The Saved Group among the religious groups is one," the Companions asked, "Oh Messenger of God, which one?" He said, "The people of the Sunnah and the followers of the Community." They asked, "Who are the people of the Sunnah and the followers of the Community?" He said, "Those who follow what I and my Companions abide by."

The Companions followed the sure path, the clear way which we have explained before. They did not take the world for its own sake but for the sake of religion. They did not become monks nor did they renounce the present world; in their mode of living they did not go to extremes, excess or negligence in gratifying their needs. Their mode of life struck a balance. It was the just and the mean between two extremes. It was the most beloved way to God the Exalted, as we have discussed in several places. And God knows best.



